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Princess of martyrs: Zaynab bint'Ali ibn Talib and the model of martyrdom in Imami Shi'ism

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Boston University

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Thesis

PRINCESS OF MARTYRS:
ZAYNAB BINT 'ALI IBN ABI TALIB AND
THE MODEL OF MARTYRDOM IN IMAMI SHI'ISM

by

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B.A., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2005

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

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2008

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Syed Yousuf Hussain, who passed away during the final stage of this project. I only wish I could have returned the kindness and care he has shown me since I was a child. As I deal with my own grief, I find solace in the story of Zaynab bint 'Ali, who constantly leaves me amazed at the strength and resilience of the human heart and spirit.

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ABSTRACT

In Imami Shi'ism, no position is more desirable than that of a martyr. Martyrdom plays a significant role in Islam but is particularly salient in the Shi'i tradition which deems Husayn ibn 'Ali, the third Imam, as the personification of struggle and death in the way of God. This thesis will argue that his sister, Zaynab, also qualifies as a martyr according to dominant theories on martyrdom in Shi'ism.

Martyrdom is the spiritual reward for the physical actions of defending truth and constructing a model for others to emulate. Through delivering testimony, safeguarding the Imamate, and perpetuating Husayn's model of martyrdom for generations to come, Zaynab establishes an alternative but legitimate paradigm of martyrdom. How Zaynab died is under contention, but whether she was killed or died naturally, she meets the criteria of a martyr in Shi'i thought.

Popular verbal discourse often affirms Zaynab's martyrdom while written works, although crediting her as Husayn's greatest supporter and partner, do not readily afford her the honor. This thesis will argue that Zaynab undoubtedly attains the station of martyrdom through her actions following Husayn's death at the Battle of Karbala. Recognizing Zaynab as a martyr will not only enrich the meaning of martyrdom, but

present it as a station that is attainable for all who wish to struggle and die in the way of God, whether in the manner of Zaynab or in the manner of Husayn.

PREFACE

There are many labels I use to describe myself: Muslim, woman, Shi'i, American, and yet, no one label can exactly capture the subtleties that exist within me. As I struggle to reconcile my different identities, I can only hope that one day my soul, my life, and my actions will even remotely reflect the life and deeds of Zaynab bint 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

As the granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad and daughter of the first Shi'i Imam, Zaynab undoubtedly has a prestigious heritage. But even when stripped of her prominent familial relations, her significance and strength is not diminished. When pondering different topics for my Master's thesis, I found that considering subjects related to Zaynab or her mother, Fatima al-Zehra, would literally cause my body to tremble in fear of not creating a work worthy of their names. Interestingly enough, topics related to the Prophet or the Shi'i Imams would not bring about such reactions from me. I maintain that this is because of the way my faith venerates these great women.

Sadly, I found that Zaynab is virtually absent from English writings on women in Islam. Her contemporaries such as the Prophet's wives and to some degree, Fatima al-Zehra, enjoy some recognition for the legend they left behind, but I felt there was a void in academic scholarship dedicated to *who* Zaynab was, and *what* she stood for in her time and in ours, not just current traditions in remembrance of the tragedy she experienced.

This essay is in honor of Zaynab bint 'Ali; a tribute not only to the struggle she endured in her life, but to the strength and courage she displayed that can only teach us what we should all strive to be like, no matter what we call ourselves in the end.

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INTRODUCTION

"We convey greetings to our princess...
She has to teach the way of Husayn, In the manner of 'Ali"[1]

As a lone woman stares across the battlefield watching her beloved older brother fall to the burning midday sands, his body showered by arrows, an identity, a purpose is being formed for an entire people. This was the scene at the Battle of Karbala in 680 C.E. when Zaynab bint 'Ali, granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad, witnessed the martyrdom of Husayn. The cornerstone of the Shi'i faith lies in the remembrance of Karbala where Husayn, younger grandson of the Prophet, earns the title of *Sayyid al-Shuhada* or Prince of Martyrs. Western and Islamic scholars consider Husayn's example to be the ultimate embodiment of martyrdom and it is through the efforts of Zaynab that the Shi'i community retains the vibrant traditions of remembrance that annually revisit Husayn's model of struggle and death in the way of God. Despite the recognition of her brother, Zaynab has been neglected in Western scholarship to say the least; she is not even afforded an entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. This is ironic because for Shi'ites, Islam survived through Zaynab.

While studying Islam in the academic setting, I have been disturbed by the poor insight into Shi'i religious doctrines. S.M.H. Jafri observes, "That the historical sources have recorded little of what we may call Shi'i religio-political theory is due to the fact that their main interest has been in events, not in the underlying principles behind those

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[1] Syed Akbar Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab: The Conqueror of Damascus and Beyond," *Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*, ed. Kamran Scot Aghaie (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005) 163. Hyder quotes the famous Urdu elegy "Salaam-e-Akhir" or "Last Greeting," typically recited on the eve of 'Ashura.

events."[2] As both a Shi'i Muslim and an academic, I observed the shallow and narrow understanding of Shi'ism due to this lack of meaningful study. Without proper insight, one cannot understand the importance of Zaynab's role in Shi'ism and indeed, in the maintenance of Islam.

I also noticed a lack of insight on the theological end: I have not come across any English devotional works (the only sources accessible to me) that explicitly affirm Zaynab as a martyr. According to dominant theories of martyrdom in Shi'ism, Zaynab personifies the definition of a *shahid*. Popular verbal discourse overwhelmingly affirms Zaynab's martyrdom. As a central figure in the Battle of Karbala who preserved the message of Husayn, Zaynab's actions are instrumental in maintaining the Shi'i tradition. Although the manner of her death is contested,[3] she nonetheless fits the dominant model of martyrdom in Imami Shi'ism.

This thesis will argue that Zaynab was not simply a charismatic and important personality, but one who exemplifies the true essence of *shahadah*. Through delivering testimony, safeguarding the Imamate, and perpetuating Husayn's model of martyrdom for generations to come, Zaynab establishes an alternative but legitimate paradigm of martyrdom. Recognizing Zaynab as a martyr will not only enrich the meaning of martyrdom, but present it as a station that is attainable for all who wish to struggle and die in the way of God, whether in the manner of Zaynab or in the manner of Husayn. I am approaching this project from a theological perspective, writing as a Shi'i Muslim,

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[2] S.H.M Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (London: Longman, 1979) 180.
[3] M. H. Bilgrami, *The Victory of Truth: The Life of Zaynab bint 'Ali* (Karachi, Pakistan: Zahra Publications, 1986) 65.

but this study will also be valuable to the scholar as it gives insight into Shi'i theories on struggle and martyrdom.

Using modern and classical academic and devotional sources,[4] I have separated this study into three parts. The first chapter will construct the model of martyrdom in Shi'i Islam by exploring the concepts of *jihad*, divine leadership, and the defining characteristics of a martyr, and demonstrate the intimate connection between them. The second chapter will provide a historical narrative, particularly from Hasan's Imamate to Zaynab's captivity in Kufa. I begin the narrative two decades before the Battle of Karbala because Husayn must be appropriately contextualized in order to understand his situation. Finally, the third chapter will tell the rest of Zaynab's story, including her testimony and captivity in Damascus. I will analyze how Zaynab's actions capture martyrdom in Shi'i Islam, complete Husayn's paradigm, and shape the *jihad* (and potential attainment of *shahadah*) of the global Shi'i community.

In order to fully appreciate Zaynab's struggle, she must be placed in historical context. According to Shi'i belief, the Prophet entrusted the leadership of the Muslim community to his descendents after his death, twelve generations of designated Imams, as ordained by God. Husayn ibn 'Ali was the third Imam in this succession of appointed leaders. His adversary at Karbala was Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah, a powerful and

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[4] I found the following works to be the most valuable for this purpose: "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam" by A. Ezzati, *Jihad and Shahadat: Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam* by Ayatullah Mahmud Taleqani, Ayatullah Murtada Mutahhari, and Dr. 'Ali Shariati, *Shi'ite Islam* by Allamah Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* by Muhammad Jarir al-Tabari, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* by S.M.H. Jafari, "Sayyedeh Zaynab: The Conqueror of Damascus and Beyond" by Syed Akbar Hyder, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* by Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Victory of Truth* by M.H. Bilgrami, *Syeda Zainab: The Exponent of Karbala* by Syed Hadi Ali Rizvi, and *Lady Zaynab* by Badr Shahin.

unscrupulous ruler, seen by many as holding an illegitimate position as head of the Islamic nation. Yazid sought Husayn's oath of allegiance but the latter refused, citing his duty to the community. Husayn requested negotiations,[5] but Yazid vowed to kill anyone who did not swear loyalty to him. On the 10th of Muharram, also known as 'Ashura, Husayn and his supporters were brutally killed in battle leaving only women, children, and one man, Zayn al-Abidin (now the fourth Imam), to be taken captive by the opposing forces. During their imprisonment of one year, Zaynab played a central role in protecting the survivors and retaining the memory of their loved ones. Ultimately, Zaynab's vital actions culminated in her testimony at the palace of Yazid in Damascus, Syria. Articulate and eloquent, Zaynab defended her brother's efforts to enjoin justice and truth, and safeguard his religion. Although Zaynab never lifted a sword, her sermons pierced her victimizers and the entire Muslim community by upholding justice at any cost, even at the possible expense of her life. Zaynab delivered fierce sermons condemning the caliph and his governor in their quarters and began the *majlis* (pl. *majalis*) ceremonies of remembrance.

Husayn is known as the savior of Islam for refusing to succumb to Yazid, and Zaynab is known as the savior of Husayn by preserving his message through *majlis* ceremonies. She is regarded as the "partner of Husayn,"[6] as she was his greatest supporter and entrusted with leading the survivors following his death. Although not one

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[5] Mahmoud Ayoub, "Ašura," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (London: Routeledge and Kegan Paul, 1987) 875. Husayn probably wanted the caliph and himself to lead their parties independently as done during the time of the 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Hasan ibn 'Ali, the first and second Shi'i Imams.

[6] Diane D'Souza, "The Figure of Zaynab in Shi'i Devotional Life," ed. David Emmanuel Singh, *Spiritual Traditions: Essential Visions for Living* (Bangalore: United Theological College, 1998) 208.

of the twelve Imams, Zaynab acted as an "Imamic regent"[7] by directing the survivors and defending them from Yazid's forces.

Martyrdom is the end to the struggle in the way of God, or *jihad*, but it does not necessitate violent death. Defending the truth is also *jihad*, a struggle qualified as a greater than battle in Shi'i thought. Struggle in this way is a valid avenue toward attaining martyrdom. In addition to "martyr," *shahid* means "witness" or "example." A martyr witnesses the truth and establishes a paradigm for others to emulate. According to this definition of martyrdom, none is more deserving of this honorary distinction than Zaynab bint 'Ali, sister of the Prince of Martyrs. Although the manner of her death is unsettled, Zaynab's deeds and actions in her life are in accordance with *jihad*, rendering her a martyr regardless of how she died. In fact, I contend that although Zaynab did not die with a sword in hand, her actions set a high standard for any martyr-hopeful. Zaynab waged battle differently than her brother but nonetheless, she is emblematic of the martyrdom model in Shi'i Islam.

Zaynab is acknowledged for her vital role in the maintenance of Shi'ism through her greater *jihad*, bravely testifying against the caliph of the time, keeping the morale of the proto-Shi'i community high, and preserving the message of Husayn. Husayn's bravery and sacrifice represent the ultimate embodiment of martyrdom, but his message could have died on the hot sands of Karbala if it was not for the conscious efforts of Zaynab to keep his message alive and circulating throughout the Muslim community, efforts that complete his cycle of martyrdom. In addition to establishing her brother's

[7] David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala: Shi'i Devotional Life in India* (New York: Palgrave Publications, 2001) 83.

paradigm, Zaynab completes her own model of martyrdom, turning a time of oppression and sadness into a powerful message of justice, hope, and resilience.

If Husayn's actions at the Battle of Karbala represented standing for truth, Zaynab's words to the caliph and the governor of Kufa embodied that message. If Husayn saved Islam from being corrupted by Yazid, Zaynab carried Islam to the following generations by saving the life of Zayn al-Abidin, the next Imam, from the forces of Yazid. If Karbala was the ultimate culmination of injustice, Zaynab's actions, words, and strength represent the definitive culmination of justice. With her central place in the event of Karbala, Zaynab bint 'Ali deserves the title of the Princess of Martyrs and is a model that every person should familiarize himself or herself with, to learn the example of upholding justice and truth in the most impossible of times.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MODEL OF MARTYRDOM IN IMAMI SHI'ISM

"So whoever breaks his oath [to us] breaks it against his own self."[8]*—Husayn ibn 'Ali*

Martyrdom has an elevated status in Islam but is particularly salient in the Imami Shi'i[9] tradition because of the "magnificence of the martyrdom of the third Imam,"[10] Husayn ibn 'Ali. Husayn's death represents the ultimate paradigm of martyrdom for Muslims as he sacrificed himself for the sake of Islam, but as a Shi'i Imam, he carries a certain reverence not seen in other brands of the faith. The placement of *shahids* in Shi'i devotion "cannot be overly emphasized."[11] They are heroes and contributors in Husayn's eternal cause of salvaging Islam, if even in the smallest form. Zaynab is instrumental in completing Husayn's model as her remembrance traditions enable the Muslim community to recall his struggle and martyrdom in the way of God. Moreover, she establishes her own paradigm through witnessing, giving testimony, and safeguarding the Shi'i leadership through her actions and traditions that help shape the Shi'i vision of *jihad* and *shahadah*. A discussion of martyrdom necessarily entails insight into other Islamic concepts; considering it in isolation will only rob *shahadah* of its meaning. Thus, I will first impart the sanctity of martyrdom in Shi'i Islam, the nuances of *jihad*, the divine leadership of the Imams and its importance to the overall struggle of the Shi'i, and the intended outcome of martyrdom.

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[8] Mahmud Taleqani, 'Ali Shari'ati, and Mortaza Mutahhari, comps; ed. Mehdi Abidi and Gary Legenhausen, *Jihad and Shahadat: Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam* (Houston: The Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986) 67.

[9] Also known as the Twelver or *Ithna-'Ashari* school of thought.

[10] Abedi and Legenhausen, *Jihad and Shahadat* 25-26.

[11] Abedi and Legenhausen, *Jihad and Shahadat* 29.

The term "martyr" is derived from Greek meaning "witness"[12] and shares the same meaning as the Arabic *shahid* in Islamic terminology, which can be rendered as "witness" or "martyr" depending on the context.[13] Sharing the same root, *shahida* is the verbal noun for witnessing or giving testimony. Muslims recognize the importance of testimony in their faith, as the first condition upon converting to Islam is taking the *shahdadah* or testimony of belief articulated as "I testify that there is no deity except Allah and I testify that Muhammad is His messenger." Moreover, Muslims pronounce the *shahadah* several times a day during their five daily prayers. In addition to "witness" and "testimony," *shahid* can be rendered as an "example, illustration, or case."[14] Following this etymological understanding, A. Ezzati provides a compelling description of what constitutes a martyr in Islam:

> A *shahid* is the person who sees and witnesses...as if the martyr witnesses and sees the truth physically and thus stands by it firmly, so much so that not only does he testify to it verbally, but he is prepared to struggle and fight and give up his life for the truth, and thus becomes a martyr. In this way, and by his struggle and sacrifice for the sake of the truth, he becomes a model, a paradigm, and an example for others, worthy of being copied, and worthy of being followed.[15]

The characteristics of martyrs are twofold: first, they bear witness to the truth and testify to it and secondly, their examples establish models for others to emulate and attain the station of martyrdom.

According to Ezzati, the prophets are the best models and establish paradigms for devotees to emulate. The same word being used for "martyr" and the best "examples"

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[12] "Martyr," Mark Boyer et al, *American Heritage Dictionary* (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston: 1983) 418.

[13] A. Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam." *Al-Serat* 12 (1986): 15 January 2008 <http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/Concept-Ezzati.htm>.

[14] Munir Baalbaki and Dr. Rohi Baalbaki, *Al-Mawrid Al-Waseet Consice Dictionary* (Beirut: Dar el-Ilm Lilmalayin, 2004) 574.

[15] Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam."

indicates a close link between martyrdom and leadership in Islam, which we will soon consider. Ezzati asserts that "Martyrs are the super-models of the divine message, too, and in this way they share a special responsibility and honour with the Prophets."[16] In fact, the Qur'an mentions them together as receiving divine favor: "Those who obey Allah and the Messenger will be in the company of those whom God has favoured of the Prophets, the saints, the martyrs and the righteous people. What excellent companions they are!"[17] {4: 69} Martyrs receive a special, spiritual designation that is afforded to the prophets of Islam through attaining the station of *shahdah*.

According to the Qur'an and Shi'i jurisprudence, "The shahid is the one who has experienced the *shuhud* (vision) of truth"[18] through their struggle and devotion to give their life for Islam. At the time of death, a martyr achieves ultimate submission to God, the goal of every Muslim.[19] The Prophet reportedly said that a martyr is not questioned in the grave because his death has already answered all questions about his faith.[20] The Qur'an also gives insight into the elevated station of martyrs: "And do not say of those who are killed for the Cause of Allah that they are dead. They are alive, but you are unaware [of them]."[21] {2:154} After experiencing physical death, the martyr gains metaphysical life. This is why martyrdom is so desirable for Shi'ites, for it is the only

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[16] Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam."
[17] Majid Fakhry, *An Interpretation of the Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings, A Bilingual Edition* (New York: New York University Press, 2004) 91.
[18] Taleqani, *Jihad and Shahadat* 67.
[19] Sayyed Hossein Nasr, "The Spiritual Significance of Jihad," *Al-Serat* (9:1) 23 January 2008 <http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/jihad-nasr.htm>.
[20] Mutahhari, *Jihad and Shahadat* 132.
[21] Fakhry, *Interpretation of the Qur'an* 28.

death that is more sanctified than life itself.[22] Martyrdom is attained through righteous struggle in the way of God or *jihad*.

Although it is often understood as combat, E. Tyan defines *jihad* as "an effort directed upon oneself for the attainment of moral and religious perfection."[23] Sayyed Hossein Nasr argues that the "erroneous" description of *jihad* as "holy war" coupled by the idea that Islam is the religion of the sword undermines the concept of striving in order to attain a higher form of submission.[24] Moreover, he argues that seeing *jihad* in a strictly physical capacity "eclipses its inner and spiritual significance."[25] Struggle in the way of God is classified as the greater and the lesser. Surprisingly, the greater *jihad* or *jihad al-akbar* is not physical fighting, but the internal battle to stay on the righteous path. Ayatullah Taleqani (d. 1979) tells us that *jihad* is any defense of Islam and its principles[26] while Ayatullah Tabataba'i (d. 1981) asserts that striving in defense of the truth is "much more profound and sweeping than the defense of one's homeland [external *jihad*]."[27] Shi'i Muslims see violent death as linked to martyrdom, especially considering that Husayn was killed on a desert battlefield, but not essentially as popularly perceived.

Rather than being associated with violent death, *jihad* and *shahadat* are intrinsically linked with concepts such as justice and truth. Following his holistic

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[22] Mutahhari, *Jihad and Shahadat* 128. This will be displayed further in the discussion on *jihad*.
[23] E. Tyan, "Djihad," *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* ed. P. Bearman et al (Brill 2008) 06 January 2008 <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-0189>.
[24] Nasr, "The Spiritual Significance of Jihad."
[25] Nasr, "The Spiritual Significance of Jihad."
[26] Taleqani, *Jihad and Shahadat* 47.
[27] Tabataba'i, 'Allemeh Sayyed Mohammad Hosayn, *Islamic Teachings: An Overview,* trans. R. Campbell (New York: Alavi Foundation, 2000) 191.

approach to the study of martyrdom, Ezzati argues that truth (*haqq*) is the axis upon which all discussions of righteous struggle must turn: "*Jihad* is the means for establishing truth, and may lead to martyrdom, but does not necessarily lead to being killed for it in the battlefield, although it necessarily involves the continuous Holy Struggle and death in the cause of the struggle."[28] Striving earns the title of *mujahid* and may lead to martyrdom "even though he is not killed, on the condition that he says loyal to the divine truth and stands ready to fight for the truth and to defend it at all costs."[29] The strength to testify to the truth in any form is *jihad* and is the gateway to *shahadat*, whether on the battlefield or through the greater struggle to establish righteousness.

Imami Shi'ites overwhelmingly regard *jihad al-akbar* as more important than the external *jihad.*[30] Widely persecuted for their beliefs and practices, the spiritual struggle maintained the Shi'i tradition from generation to generation. Shi'i scholars classify a range of actions to fall under *jihad al-akbar*, from testimony in court of one's beliefs to writing, advocating, and defending the tradition of the Imams and their followers.[31] This also affects the meaning of martyrdom for the Shi'i and Sunni traditions, as the persecutor and the persecuted, the killer and the killed,[32] are different in each case.

Battles during the life of the Prophet Muhammad were Muslims fighting against a non-Muslim group. Both Sunni and Shi'i traditions unanimously deem those who fell

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[28] Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam."
[29] Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam."
[30] Tyan, EI^2.
[31] The issues of struggle and martyrdom may seem to stand in opposition *taqiyya* or dissimulation, a practice predominately endorsed by the Shi'i where a Muslim hides his beliefs to save his life. Tabataba'i explains that *taqiyya* is permissible in cases where a person faces certain danger and defiance against some harmful force will not give any benefit to the larger cause of Islam. 'Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam,* trans. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975) Appendix II "Taqiyya." 223-225.
[32] David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2007) 44.

in these physical struggles as martyrs. However, following the Prophet's death, internal war and persecution became more commonplace, prompting discussion on which of those perished should be deemed martyrs. According to David Cook, Sunni schools of thought tend to have a more "narrow understanding of martyrdom…since Sunnis have hardly ever been in the situation where they were oppressed (compared for example to Shi'ites); for this reason they have tended to focus on those martyrs from the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the early conquests."[33] Certainly, there are prominent exceptions, such as the second and third caliphs who were assassinated by Muslims, and those who expire while doing a righteous act.[34] Typically, Sunni jurists follow the precedent set during the Prophet's time that a person must die at the hand of an unbeliever in order to qualify as a martyr. This opinion disqualifies most of the Shi'i Imams and their followers, as they were often assassinated by the Muslim party in power. Shi'i thought considers those who die while defending the truth, whether in combat, by execution, or in their own beds as attaining the station of martyrdom.

Indeed, those who live and die as true believers are attributed with the honor of martyrdom through exemplifying the inner struggle of *jihad al-akbar*. In the Shi'i tradition, this includes all the prophets, including Prophet Muhammad. Without considering the spiritual side of *jihad*, ruling on the Prophet's death is in question. The

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[33] Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 47.

[34] Etan Kohlberg, "Shahid" *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman et al (Brill 2008) 6 January 2008 <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-1025>. Other exceptions include those who die from some natural aliments, assassination, and extenuating circumstances.

opinion on this varies across Sunni schools of thought[35] while the Shi'i tradition unanimously considers him a *shahid* as he is the timeless example of the perfect believer. Additionally, all of the Imams except for the last, living Imam (currently in occultation) are deemed martyrs although besides Husayn, none were killed in combat. In fact, the Imami tradition maintains that a true believer expiring on his deathbed will receive the same reward as one who dies fighting alongside the Prophet in battle.[36]

Although *jihad al-akbar* is an inner struggle, it nevertheless manifests itself in an exterior form. Martyrs often face a defining test in their lives that challenges their degree of faith. Wayne Husted writes, "Shi'ite Islam does not restrict *jihad* to physical conflict alone. *Jihad* may be done through polemic."[37] Husted outlines popular martyrs in Shi'i history who have been executed for propagating their beliefs through writing and refusing to renounce their positions. They are considered *shahids* upon witnessing the truth and testifying to their beliefs, the first conditions in attaining martyrdom. Husted's study gives us insight into what constitutes *jihad*, as these martyrs propagate the teachings of the Imams until their deaths. Thus, any effort directed at maintaining the leadership and message of the Imams qualifies as *jihad,* as they are the guardians of the truth for Shi'i Muslims.

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[35] Kohlberg, EI^2.There is a tradition that the Prophet was killed by eating a piece of poisoned mutton given to him by Zaynab b. al-Harith during the Khaybar expedition. If this is accepted as authentic by the Sunni jurist, he would rule the Prophet's death as martyrdom.

[36] Kohlberg, EI^2. One could argue that rendering nonviolent death as martyrdom dilutes its meaning, but so would seeing *jihad* and *shahadat* in a strictly violent sense. Several traditions of the Prophet indicate that the warrior's intention to fight for the sake of God renders him a martyr, not just death in battle. Moreover, attaining the status of a true believer is no easy task and requires significant effort through *jihad al-akbar.*

[37] Wayne R. Husted, "Karbala Made Immediate: The Martyr as Model in Imami Shi'ism," *The Muslim World* (1993) 265.

Husted's examples illustrate the intimate and necessary relationship between leadership and martyrdom in Imami Shi'ism. What is often described as a political split, the initial schism between the caliphate and imamate is for the Shi'i wholly religious.[38] Shi'i scholars interpret the Prophet's announcements at a few historical events, primarily at *Ghadir Khumm*,[39] as clear instructions to follow 'Ali ibn Abi Talib after his death, the noncompliance of which is disobeying God. This is a very important point that I wish to stress: in spite of the many virtues of 'Ali, following him and the other Imams stems from a firm belief that the Prophet appointed 'Ali as his religious-political successor by divine designation. The Imams' temporal leadership remained largely unacknowledged as predicted by the Prophet: "Both Sunni and Shi'ite sources have transmitted this saying of the Holy Prophet concerning Hasan and Husayn: 'these two children of mine are Imams whether they stand up or sit down' (allusion to whether they occupy the external function of caliphate or not)."[40] Yet, people's recognition has no bearing on the validity of the Imams' position, although it has ramifications on those who deny them as such: "Since the *imam* is not chosen by men but appointed by God himself, his rejection by men in no way annuls his authority: this, for Shi'i theology, would be tantamount to thwarting the divine will."[41] Conversely, following the Imams is following divine will.

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[38] Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Shi'ism: Imamate and Wilayat* (Ontario: Al-Ma'arif Books, 1999) 118-121.
[39] Rizvi, *Shi'ism*, 13, 33. The events of *Dawat Dhul-'Ashira* and *Mubahila* are also prominent among these events.
[40] 'Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*. trans. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975) 195.
[41] Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashura' in Twelver Shi'ism* (Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978) 124.

Leadership in general and Imamate in particular is of paramount importance in Shi'i theology. Prophethood and Imamate are *usul al-deen*[42] or roots of religion; belief in both is necessary for the realization of the truth. Not only are Prophets and Imams "of one physical and spiritual lineage,"[43] but the two concepts are interdependent: Prophethood lays the foundation for Imamate and the Imams complete the task of the Prophets. As successors to Prophet Muhammad, the Imams guard the completed message of God, the Qur'an. Indeed, Shi'i thought asserts that the Imams are the "companions of the Qur'an, the living Word in the true sense of this expression. Their lives and deeds are the exegesis (*ta'wil*) of the Holy Book."[44] Affirming and defending the Imams is a religious act as it is maintaining a religious cause. Recognizing the Shi'i doctrine of Imamate as a divinely designated ordinance is imperative to understanding Zaynab's *jihad,* as she safeguards truth when she preserves the third Imam's example and saves the fourth Imam's life. Participation in the struggle to defend the Imams' leadership is considered *jihad* and death in the struggle for its maintenance is *shahadah*, as is the case with Zaynab bint 'Ali.

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[42] Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam* 11. The five *usul al-deen* or roots of religion are *tawhid* (unity of God), '*adl* (divine justice), *nabuwat* (prophethood), *imammat* (imamate), and *qiyamat* (day of judgment).

[43] Mahmoud Ayoub, "The Excellences of the Imam Husayn in Sunni *Hadith* Tradition," *Al-Serat* 11(1986) 15 January 2008 <http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/Excellences-Ayoub.htm>. Lineage carries importance in Islam and the Abrahamic traditions. Abraham's line split between his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, and the last appointed leader of each descent have similar fates: Isaac's line ends with Jesus and Ishmael's ends with Muhammad's great grandson, Muhammad al-Mahdi or the twelfth Shi'i Imam. Both are believed to be in occultation (*ghayba*) until the reckoning when they will return together to establish righteousness on earth.

[44] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 43. This reflects the essence of the *hadith* of *Thaqalayn* when the Prophet pronounced that he is leaving behind two things to lead his people: the Qur'an and the *Ahl-al Bayt*. Variations on this *hadith* are reported but this version is widely available in Sunni and Shi'i sources. Rizvi, *Shi'ism* 140.

Leadership is the linchpin of authentic and uncorrupt faith, teachings, and practice, and produces the divinely inspired paradigm to be emulated by believers: "the divine message may not be fully appreciated unless the embodiment of this divine message, or the Model of Guidance, and the Supreme Paradigm (*imama* or *uswa*) is properly recognized."[45] Acknowledging and accepting divinely appointed leadership is essential to understanding broader topics in religion and is necessarily related to struggle and martyrdom. In the Shi'i view, elected religious leadership poses a very specific and real danger. As well-intentioned as the leaders may be, they are also prone to corruption and eventually, the leadership can be passed into the wrong hands. A common sentiment among the Shi'i is "Husayn was killed on the day of Saqifah"[46] when the first caliph was elected, as it was the first stepping stone to Yazid's appointment. As an unscrupulous leader, Yazid is the pinnacle of this danger, while Husayn is the pinnacle of Imamate and *shahadah* in its purest sense—sacrificing his family and himself for the sake of his religion. For Yazid, Husayn's death represented securing worldly power while to Husayn's followers, the Imam's bravery in facing his enemy in battle represents the true and pure manifestation of righteous struggle and martyrdom. Not only do the Imams safeguard the correct understanding of these concepts, but they embody their essences throughout their lives and provide the means by which a Muslim can live as a *mujahid* and die a *shahid*.

As guardians of the truth, the Imams are appointed to guide the community on the path of righteousness, including *jihad fi sabil Allah*, or struggle in the path of God.

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[45] Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam."
[46] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 93.

With one exemption, *jihad* is followed by "in the path of God"[47] in the Qur'an, indicating the importance of intention in righteous struggle. As an integral part of Shi'i theology, maintaining the leadership of the Imams necessarily relates to a person's *jihad fi sabil Allah*. *Ahl al-Bayt,* or people of the house, is the inclusive term of the Fourteen Immaculates: the Prophet, Fatima, and the twelve Imams.[48] The notion of the *Ahl al-Bayt* centers on five individuals: Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn. The *Ahl al-Kisa (*people of the cloak),[49] as these five are often called, are considered the most intimate and beloved of God among all creation due to their extraordinary faith and devotion. Although Zaynab is not among them, her closeness cannot be denied as she grew up in a home with four of the *Ahl al-Kisa*. Ensuring divine knowledge is kept whole and faith uncorrupt requires an elevated set of transmitters and interpreters found in the Imams, the teachings of which are maintained through the traditions of Zaynab.

For Imami Shi'ites, struggle in the way of God is beyond choice; it is institutionalized in their faith. Mahmoud Ayoub states that although *jihad* is encouraged for all Muslims in general, the "Shi'i tradition carried this requirement a step further, making *jihad* one of the pillars or foundations (*arkan*) of religion."[50] In fact, following

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[47] Hanna E. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur'an*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 587. *Jihad fi sabil Allah* can be found in {9:24}, {22:78}, {60:1}. Exemption: {25:52}.

[48] In popular discourse, this term may also include other prominent family members such as Zaynab, but the Qur'anic paradigm refers to these Fourteen Immaculates.

[49] These five are called "people of the cloak" or "mantel" in reference to the verse sent down when the Prophet covered himself and these four individuals with a cloak: "Allah only wishes to turn away abomination from you and purity you fully, O People of the House." {33:33} According to Shi'i interpretation, this verse affirms the immaculate nature of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and signifies who are considered "people of the house" as Umm Salama, the Prophet's wife, was not allowed to lie under the cloak. The narration of its revelation is quite interesting as it centers on Fatima to explain that her children are the *Ahl al-Bayt*, including the nine Imams that had not been born yet. Refer to *Fatima is Fatima* by 'Ali Shariati. Translation of verse: Fakhry, *Interpretation of the Qur'an* 423.

[50] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 142.

the words of Husayn and Zaynab, the Shi'i consider standing against tyranny a *jihad* and an incumbent part of their faith or they are accomplices in oppression and injustice. In Shi'i Islam, there is a "sharp sense of protest and agitation against injustice."[51] Shi'i Islam is strongly founded on the notion of justice, which lies at the heart of Karbala and the teachings of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. As Syed Hyder Akbar puts it, "speaking for the cause of justice had been the vocation of the Prophet's family,"[52] including Zaynab bint 'Ali.

The true test of a martyr is in his or her success in being a paradigmatic force. Whether it is by his conduct throughout his entire life or in a single encounter, the martyr produces a model that inspires others and illustrates a true adoption of *jihad*, whether in the lesser or greater form. The ideal "models…have the ability to elicit a response from a follower of a particular religious tradition"[53] and are considered examples in leading a spiritual life. Of the martyr's potential influence, Cook says:

> While there are many martyrs to be found in history, few are chosen to be representative of a given movement, belief system, or people. Of those few, even fewer speak across cultural boundaries and become global in their reach. But those stories that have become global are among the most moving and dramatic that humanity has produced and continues to inspire people, generation after generation.[54]

What makes the Karbala case so unique is the universality of the example demonstrated. Although an Imam of the Shi'ites, praises of Husayn are readily found in Sunni sources where he is still regarded as *Sayyid al-Shuhada*.[55]

Martyrs experience an "internal revolution"[56] that manifests itself in the world as a revolution of hearts and minds against tyranny, oppression, and injustice and in the

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[51] Abedi and Lengenhausen, *Jihad and Shahadat* 26.
[52] Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 164.
[53] Husted, "Karbala Made Immediate" 268.
[54] Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* 4.
[55] Ayoub, "The Excellences of the Imam Husayn."
[56] Taleqani, *Jihad and Shahadat* 68.

case of Husayn, is frequently recalled by those in and outside of his religious tradition. The object of *shahadah* is to create "fervor"[57] in the community so others' sense of righteousness is awakened with the martyr's death. The martyr is not the lone beneficiary from his act of altruism. He experiences rewards in the afterlife, but his community and society also feel the ramifications of his sacrifice, making the martyr a paradigmatic force. Therefore, it is valuable to explore the effect of Zaynab's actions and death on society to measure her martyr status.

Considering the defining characteristics of a martyr is beneficial when exploring the case of Zaynab as discourse over *jihad* in Imami Shi'ism affirms that women are excluded from participation when the struggle falls within the realm of physical battle.[58] Some *hadith* contend that a woman expiring on *hajj* is an acceptable substitute for fighting in combat, but there is evidence that the same is applicable to men.[59] Traditions do affirm, however, that just as martyrdom through physical *jihad* is an opportunity exclusively for men, death due to complications during childbirth is a *jihad* and *shahadah* exclusively for women.[60] Moreover, being patient with and keeping their husbands content is a *jihad* for women,[61] while I have not found any evidence for the opposite.

Aside from these exclusive forms of struggle, *jihad* in its holistic sense carries a deeper meaning in the Shi'i tradition that is applicable and incumbent on all, to stand for

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[57] Mutahhari, *Jihad and Shahadat* 148.
[58] Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam* 200. The Sunni Malaki school of thought also precludes women from fighting in battle.
[59] Husted, "Karbala Made Immediate" 264.
[60] Husted, "Karbala Made Immediate" 264.
[61] Muhammad Shirazi, *War, Peace and Non-Violence: An Islamic Perspective* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Incorporated, 2001) 24.

Islam at all costs: "In fact, the Qur'anic demand is for us to stand for and by the truth, even if that means bearing testimony against our parents or ourselves."[62] Taking the holistic definition of *shahadah* into consideration enhances the idea of martyrdom and makes it obtainable to all: men and women, young and old, able-bodied and disabled.[63]

Understanding martyrdom in its full capacity will not only enrich the meaning of *shahadah* but also open the possibility of attaining this sanctified station to those who thought it was inaccessible. Additionally, combat was not religiously viable[64] after the death of Husayn and declaring a physical *jihad* is disallowed while the Twelfth Imam remains in occultation.[65] Hence, *jihad al-akbar* maintained truth and justice for the Shi'i and preserved the traditions of the Imams throughout its history. The existence of the Shi'i has been one of persecution and persistence, a struggle for the survival and maintenance of the Imami tradition—effectively, a constant *jihad*. The concepts of *jihad* and *shahadah* are eternally captured in the event of Karbala which serves as inspiration for the Shi'i to fight for justice and truth. Zaynab's traditions provide an avenue to recall and realign with the Imams and shape the *jihad* of the global Shi'i community by allowing them to symbolically reenact what Zaynab did in the aftermath of Karbala.

All are afforded equal opportunity to engage in *jihad* and attain *shahadah* in the manner of *jihad al-akbar*, in the manner of Zaynab. The following chapter will detail the

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[62] Liyakat Takim, "The Moral-Ethical Jihad," *Reflections* 3:1 (Moharram 2007) 6. Takim refers to the following verse: "O believers, be upholders of justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves, your parents or kinsmen." {4:135}

[63] Tyan asserts that participation in physical *jihad* "is a duty which falls upon every Muslim who is male, free, and able-bodied" while all others are excluded. EI^2.

[64] Abedi and Legenhausen, *Jihad and Shahadat* 15-26. There are strict edicts on what justifies beginning or participating in physical *jihad*.

[65] Tyan, EI^2. Tyan maintains that "The participation of the *djihad* is necessarily suspended until the re-appearance of the Imam" who has been in occultation since 941 C.E.

life of Zaynab bint 'Ali with special attention given to her time at and after Karbala when she displayed the distinct characteristics of a martyr through witnessing, delivering testimony, and safeguarding the Imamate. I will closely detail the account of Husayn as well, as his example is the eternal model of martyrdom by which we will measure Zaynab. The third chapter will use the evidence from the first two parts to show that through her efforts, Zaynab bint 'Ali warrants the title of the Princess of Martyrs.

CHAPTER TWO: THE STORY OF ZAYNAB BINT 'ALI

"We all know how to die after living, but you taught the world how to live after dying."[66]

In order to fully appreciate and comprehend the martyrdom of Zaynab, one must not only know the story of her life, but also the story of her brother Husayn, the Prince of Martyrs, who sets the eternal standard for all *shahids*. Hasan's Imamate will also be chronicled as it frames Husayn's paradigm of martyrdom, in which we will later place Zaynab. Familiarity with the historical context is imperative to grasp the gravity of Husayn's situation. Understanding these episodes is important to Zaynab's martyrdom, as any *jihad* necessarily entails struggle for religion in its entirety, including the inherent religious-political system of the Imams.

Zaynab bint 'Ali bin Abi Talib was born in Medina in 626 C.E. She was regarded as the "most accomplished and outstanding woman of the Bani Quresh"[67] and was married to her first cousin, 'Abdullah bin Ja'far bin Abi Talib, who displayed many virtues of his own. Of the many proposals Zaynab received, including one extended by Mu'awiyah for his son Yazid, 'Abdullah was the only one favorable in the eyes of Zaynab's father.[68] It is possible that she was a co-wife with Layla bint Mas'uad[69] although this is not widely reported. She had five children: 'Ali al-Zaynabi, 'Abbas, 'Awn, Muhammad, and a daughter, Umm Kulthum. Reports confirm that 'Awn and Muhammad were killed at Karbala, but all four sons may have died in the battle.

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[66] Hyder, *Reliving Karbala* 7. Hyder quotes a "20th century devotee" poeticizing about Husayn ibn 'Ali.
[67] Syed Hadi Ali Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab: The Exponent of Karbala* (Karachi, Pakistan: Idara Tamaddun-I-Islam, 1985) 8.
[68] Badr Shahin, *Lady Zaynab (Peace be on her)* (Qom, Iran: Ansariyan Brothers Publications, 2006) 69, 72.
[69] Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Sa'd, *The Women of Madina* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1995) 300.

For the Shi'i, her very name is representative of her character. "Zayn" meaning "ornament" and "ab" meaning "father" illustrates that Zaynab is reflective of 'Ali[70] in character, skill, and especially, her manner of speech. Moreover, the naming of Zaynab is particularly telling of her status in Shi'i understanding. At their birth, each of her brothers, Hasan and Husayn, were brought to the Prophet who then asked God for a suitable name. The angel Gabriel brought their names from heaven. This procedure is understandable for her brothers as they were destined to be the Imams of mankind, but Zaynab was also named in the same manner. Her parents took her to the Prophet of Islam who consulted Gabriel and received the name "Zaynab" from heaven.[71] She holds a central role for the Shi'i, as she "witnessed the most critical events in the history of Islam"[72] including the death of her loved ones. Her prominent elders, Muhammad, Fatima, and 'Ali, foretold the tragedy at Karbala and entrusted Zaynab with the responsibility to care for her brothers and being their greatest supporter.[73]

The family of the Prophet was known for their closeness and the relationship between Zaynab and Husayn, three years her senior, was no exception. Even during childhood, their bond was apparent. As an infant, Zaynab's crying could only be quelled when Husayn would hold her. She would lie in his arms and gaze at his face.[74] Before

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[70] D'Souza, "The Figure of Zaynab in Shi'i Devotional Life" 207.
[71] D'Souza, "The Figure of Zaynab in Shi'i Devotional Life" 208; Shahin, *Lady Zaynab* 55.
[72] Muhammad Fahmi Al-Wahab, "Sayyida Zainab: The Chosen of Bani Hashim," trans. Evelyn A. Early, *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press1993) 231.
[73] D'Souza, "The Figure of Zaynab in Shi'i Devotional Life" 208.
[74] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 20.

praying, she would first glance at his face and then begin her prayer,[75] a possible indication that saving her brother's memory was essential to saving prayer.

Zaynab's future suffering was predicted early on. A few days after her birth, the angel Gabriel wept and told the Prophet, "From early on in life this girl will remain entangled in tribulations and trials in this world."[76] At the age of five, Zaynab had a dream that the sky darkened and a violent wind arose in the city, causing the little girl to be swept onto a large tree. The wind uprooted the tree and she caught hold of two branches but they also broke. Then Zaynab grabbed a hold of two twigs, but those also snapped, causing her to fly into the merciless wind. When she awoke, she told her grandfather about the dream. The Prophet cried and said, "O my daughter, that tree is me who is shortly going to leave this world. The branches are your father, 'Ali and your mother, Fatima Zehra, and the twigs are your brothers, Hasan and Husayn. They will all depart this world before you do, and you will suffer their separation and loss."[77] Six months after the Prophet died, her mother passed away in 633 C.E. Zaynab was only seven at the time of Fatima al-Zehra's death, but "she remembered her mother's last wish on the deathbed, for Zainab to stay with her brothers and be a mother to them…she was to Hassan and Hussein, as they grew up, the equivalent of their mother, as she was also to her young sister, Um Kulthum."[78]

Zaynab married and lived in Medina until 656 C.E. when 'Ali was chosen as caliph and moved to Kufa in present day Iraq. Zaynab's family moved with her father.

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[75] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 20.
[76] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 16.
[77] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 16-17.
[78] Al-Wahab, "Sayyida Zainab" 232.

She was well-known in Medina as a foremost scholar on Islam and the Qur'an. Her reputation as a knowledgeable and great teacher preceded her, as the women of Kufa were eager to begin their own classes upon her arrival. Her students numbered up to one thousand with some narrations reporting more.[79] In Medina "She was able to impart the teachings with such clarity and eloquence that she became known as *fasiha* (skillfully fluent) and *balighah* (intensely eloquent)."[80] She was nicknamed *'alimah ghayr mu'alimah*, or she who knows without being taught, by her nephew 'Ali bin Husayn who was also known as Zayn al-Abidin.

Zaynab's father was killed while leading morning prayer in the mosque in Ramadan 661 C.E. Upon his death, Hasan inherited the Imamate but was also "acclaimed as Caliph by forty thousand people in Kufa immediately after the death of his father."[81] Mu'awiyah bin Abu Sufyan, then governor of Syria, had been "working for the office [of caliph] since the death of Uthman" and began a covert campaign against Hasan. Agents were sent into Kufa, Hijaz, Yemen, and Persia to rally support for Mu'awiyah taking the caliphate. He secured an army of sixty thousand and thus began a series of letter exchanges between the two leaders.

Their correspondence gives insight into the mindset of each contender for the caliphate and their justification for authority. Upon receiving Mu'awiyah's letter demanding rule of the Muslim nation, Hasan replies:

> We were shocked to see that some people snatched away our right from us even though they were men of excellences, virtues, and merits, and were the forerunners in Islam [reference to the first three caliphs]. But now what a great astonishment and shock it is to see that you, O Mu'awiya, are attempting to accede to a

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[79] Anita Rai, *The Essential Woman* (London: Starsighter Limited, 2005) 30.
[80] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 22.
[81] Jafari, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 130.

thing which you do not deserve. You do not possess any known merit in religion (*din*), nor have you any trace (*athar*) in Islam which has ever been praised...so give up your persistence in falsehood (*batil*) and enter into my homage as other people have done, for you are certainly aware of the fact that I am far more entitled to the caliphate than you in the eyes of God and all worthy people. Fear God, restrain yourself from rebellion and from shedding the blood of Muslims; for by God, there would be no good for you to meet your Lord with the responsibility of the blood of the Muslims.[82]

It is eerie that Hasan warns against the shedding of Muslim blood just two decades before the massacre of his brother. Mu'awiyah's reply is as follows:

Had I believed that you had a better grasp over the subject people than I do, that you could protect the community better than I, and you were stronger in safeguarding the properties of the Muslims and in outwitting the enemy than I, then I would have done what you have asked me. But I have a longer period of reign, and am more experienced, better in policies, and older in age than you. It would therefore be better of you not to insist on what you have asked me; if you enter into obedience to me now, you will accede to the caliphate after me.[83]

Juxtaposed to Hasan's letter invoking the necessary religious knowledge of a leader, Mu'awiyah's words display his interest in acquiring the caliphate for political means, not religious: "Mu'awiya made explicit what had been so far implicit: the separation between political and religious principles, which was henceforth permanently established."[84] Thus, his insistence was for Hasan to remit temporal leadership, not any religious authority. Mu'awiyah's correspondence and delay in entering the city also suggests combat was not his primary interest but rather, coercing Hasan into relinquishing the position of caliph.[85]

Following more exchanges and some military upheaval, Hasan and Mu'awiyah agreed on a treaty that recognized Mu'awiyah as caliph based on several conditions. Records of the exact stipulations slightly vary, but the most important point for our

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[82] Jafri,*Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 135-136.
[83] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 136.
[84] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 137.
[85] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 136-137. Jafri speculates that gathering an army was an act of intimidation since initiating war against the Prophet's family would have marred Mu'awiyah's reputation and legitimacy beyond repair.

purpose is the matter of succession. According to reports, either Hasan was to become caliph upon Mu'awiyah's death or the matter would be left to the community's consensus. In either case, Mu'awiyah was barred from naming a successor. After nearly ten years of Mu'awiyah's rule, Hasan was poisoned, allegedly at the caliph's order[86] in 669 C.E. Husayn was now Imam and the community anticipated his formal ascension as caliph after Mu'awiyah's demise.

Within six years of Hasan's death, Mu'awiyah began to collect homage for his son Yazid to lead as caliph despite the blatant breach of contract that was settled by both parties. Yazid inheriting the caliphate was disturbing to many as he "commanded no respect in the community. His anti-Islamic behaviour and openly irreligious practices were well known throughout the Muslim world and earned for him contempt and disfavour, especially among those who cared for religion."[87] Even when Mu'awiyah asked Ibn Ziyad, then governor of Basra, to collect homage from his city's inhabitants for his son, the latter advised the former to counsel Yazid on his behavior first.[88] The visibility of Yazid's actions including drinking, womanizing, and gambling made his ascension to power particularly unsettling, not to mention his appointment's "close proximity to the Prophet and the *Rashindun* caliphs, of whom he claimed to be the successor and from whose authority he derived his title."[89] As sixth caliph, a person of

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[86] L. Veccia Vaglieri, "(al-) Hasan b. Alī b. Abī Tālib," *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* ed. P. Bearman et al (Brill 2008)18 April 2008 <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-0272>. If one accepts the former stipulation as authentic it would suggest Hasan was murdered so Mu'awiyah could name a successor.

[87] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 174. See also *The Cambridge History of Islam*, 81.

[88] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 181.

[89] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 174.

such character had secured the place of leading the faithful within fifty years of the Prophet's death.

Husayn was one of only four men who refused to give their allegiance to Yazid,[90] who was warned of their potential dissidence. On his deathbed, Mu'awiyah told his son,

> I have arranged everything for you, and I made all the Arabs agree to obey you. No one will now oppose you in your title to the caliphate, but I am very much afraid of Husayn ibn 'Ali, 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar, 'Abd ar-Rahman b. Abi Bakr, and 'Abd Allah b. az-Zubayr. Among them Husayn b. 'Ali commands great love and respect because of his superior rights and close relationship to the Prophet. I do not think that the people of Iraq will abandon him until they have risen in rebellion for him against you.[91]

Even before assuming power, Yazid speculated that these men would present a definite obstacle to securing full control of the people with Husayn presenting the most threat, as his father acknowledged his "superior rights" and reverence from the people. It is particularly telling of the opposition against Bani Umayya that the aforementioned men were descendants of the most well-known personalities during the Prophet's time.

The day after his father's death in Rajab 680 C.E., Yazid wrote to the governor of Medina, Walid bin 'Utba, ordering him to pursue Abdullah bin Zubayr, Abdullah bin 'Umar, and Husayn bin 'Ali to collect their homage. Yazid's orders were clear "that they should not be allowed to delay, and if they refused, that Walid should behead them at once."[92] Accordingly, the latter sent for the men at "an unusual hour"[93] of the night. Husayn honored the governor's orders and went to the court with a small band of supporters, still unrelenting in his refusal to submit authority and citing that either way, *bay'a* (oath of acknowledgment) must be given in public and directly to the caliph who

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[90] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 26.
[91] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 175.
[92] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 176.
[93] L.Veccia Vaglieri, "(al-) Husayn b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman et al (Brill 2008) 06 January 2008 <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-0304>.

resided in Damascus. Marwan bin al-Hakam insisted that he be decapitated immediately, to which Walid responded, "By God, if the entire wealth and treasures of the whole world were given to me I would not kill Husayn…for in the sight of God there cannot be anything more accountable than the blood of Husayn."[94] Spoken by one who has already submitted his allegiance to the caliph, Walid's response reflects the feeling of the community about the last grandson of the Prophet. Walid suffered consequences for not following through on Yazid's requests, however, as he was removed from his governorship shortly thereafter.

Meanwhile, Husayn began receiving letters from the people of Kufa and Basra inviting him to lead the people back to religion.[95] They found their current governors unsuitable and ceased Friday prayers and gathering on 'Eid.[96] The Kufians declared their allegiance to Husayn and promised their military support in an uprising against their governor and new caliph, and asked for him to arrive quickly. Husayn received two saddlebags full of letters from his Kufian followers estimating at one thousand letters, declaring that he had an army of eighteen thousand ready to support him.[97] The demand for Husayn's allegiance was averted when he left for Mecca with a small caravan of families intending to perform *hajj* and then travel to Kufa. Husayn was received with much adoration by the Meccans.[98] He dispatched his cousin Muslim bin 'Aqil to Kufa

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[94] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 176.
[95] The first letter was received on Ramadhan 10, 680.
[96] Islamic holidays at the end of Ramadhan and at the completion of the *hajj* pilgrimage.
[97] Muhammad Jarir al-Tabari, "The Caliphate of Yazid b. Mu'awiyah," *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk*. trans. I.K.A. Howard, Vol. XIX (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990) 94; Ayoub, *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* 875; Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 182.
[98] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 177. Even those who had surrounded Ibn Zubayr (who escaped to Mecca to avoid seeing Walid) began to gather around Husayn. Many wanted to pray with Husayn and circumambulate the Kaba with him.

with a letter stating that the latter should assess the situation and report on the truth of their commitment. In his letter to the people of Kufa, Husayn outlines his intentions and the principle of Imamate:

> I have understood what you said and that you have invited me to come to you because you have no Imam to guide you, and that you hope my arrival there will unite you in the right path and in the truth...But you must be clear about the fact that the Imam is only one who follows the Book of God, makes justice and honesty his conduct and behaviour, judges with truth, and devotes himself to the service of God.[99]

Additionally, Husayn sent a letter to the people of Basra, which gives further insight into his role as Imam:

> I have sent my messenger to you and I call you to the Book of God, and the *Sunna* of his prophet, the *Sunna* which has become obliterated and innovations have become active and energetic. If you listen to me and obey my order I will guide you to the right path.[100]

Muslim first entered Kufa in secret but as his popularity grew, he publicly gathered support for his cousin and sent a message for Husayn to come lead the people. Concurrently, 'Ubaydallah bin Ziyad's authority had been extended to Kufa, as the former governor proved to be a weak leader in the eyes of Yazid. Ibn Ziyad entered his new domain in disguise, his face covered in a veil. The Kufians, anticipating the arrival of Husayn, enthusiastically pledged their support to who they thought was their requested leader. Instead, Ibn Ziyad revealed himself and "delivered a terrifying speech, declaring death and unprecedented punishment for the sympathizers of Husayn."[101] Muslim was beheaded along with Hani bin 'Urwa with whom he had stayed. Upon speculation that the Umayyad government sent spies to assassinate him during the

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[99] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 179.
[100] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 180.
[101] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 183.

pilgrimage, Husayn abandoned his *hajj*[102] and gathered his caravan. Receiving Muslim's letter prior to Ibn Ziyad's arrival, Husayn set out to Kufa with his caravan on 8 Dhul Hijja 680 C.E., the same day his cousin was assassinated.

While en route to meet Muslim and his followers, Husayn came across travelers who informed him of his cousin's demise. He also encountered the poet Farazdaq who warned the Imam about the Kufians' volatility: "Their hearts are with you but their swords are with [Bani Umayya]."[103] Farazdaq also observed the Umayyad army which stretched as far as his eye could see, but his efforts to deter Husayn were futile, as the Imam cited his commitment to the people's call.

Ibn Ziyad stationed military at different checkpoints surrounding Kufa and dispatched Hurr bin Yazid bin Riyahi[104] with one thousand troops to intercept Husayn on the way to Kufa. The subsequent confrontation happened on a very hot day and noticing the thirst of the opposing army, Husayn ordered his men to give their water to the Umayyad troops.[105] Husayn explained that he was invited to Kufa and produced the two saddlebags filled with letters. Hurr replied that he had no knowledge of the invitations and his task was to stay with Husayn until he conceded to Ibn Ziyad. Husayn again refused and instead, addressed the Kufians opposing him: "...I did not come to you until your letters were brought to me... [if you] are averse to my coming, I will leave you for the place from which I came to you,"[106] declaring that his only reason for heading

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[102] He changed his intention from *hajj* to *umrah* which has fewer rituals for its completion in order to avoid bloodshed at the Ka'ba.
[103] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 185.
[104] Not to be mistaken with Yazid b. Mu'awiyah, the current caliph.
[105] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 92-93; Jafari *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a* 186.
[106] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 93.

toward Kufa was the people's call. He then addressed Hurr and his men with the following:

> People, the Apostle of God said: When anyone sees the authorities make permissible what God had forbidden, violating God's covenant, and opposing the Sunnah of the Apostle of God by action against the servants of God sinfully and with hostility, when anyone sees all these incidents and does not upbraid them by deed or by word, it is God's decree to make that person subject to fortune. Indeed, these authorities have cleaved to obedience to Satan and have abandoned obedience to the Merciful…My life is with your lives, my family is with your families.[107]

Husayn's speech details the actions of Yazid and his supporters. Additionally, he affirms his willingness to fight for their cause ("My life is with your life"), but is not imposing his leadership if it is not the desire of the people. He also said, "Can you not see that truth is no longer something that men practice and falsehood is no longer desisted from, so that the believer rightly desires to meet God. I can only regard death as martyrdom (*shahadah*) and life with these oppressors as a tribulation."[108] Husayn cites that societal norms have changed due to the weak religious and political structure.

As a compromise between the two sides, Husayn continued to travel toward Kufa off the main route with the Umayyad army close behind. Hurr sent a letter to Ibn Ziyad stating that Husayn again requested negotiations. A messenger brought Ibn Ziyad's response back to Hurr and without greeting Husayn, handed the letter to his commander. It read, "…make al-Husayn come to a halt. Let him stop in an open place without protection and water. I have ordered my messenger to stay with you and not to leave you until he brings me news of your carrying out my instructions."[109] It was on the plains of Karbala where Husayn and his caravan were stopped. They pitched their tents. It was 2 Muharram 681 C.E.

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[107] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 95-96.
[108] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 96.
[109] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 102.

The next day, 'Umar bin Sa'd arrived from Kufa with 4,000 men as dispatched by Ibn Ziyad. He stationed 500 cavalry men along the Euphrates to prevent water retreating back to Husayn's camp. Not wanting to shed Husayn's blood, Ibn Sa'd insisted that the governor of Kufa negotiate with him. Ibn Ziyad was almost swayed to speak with Husayn when the notorious Shimr bin Dhul-Jawshan, known for his ruthlessness, intervened and said it would be a sign of weakness to hold talks with dissidents such as the Prophet's grandson. Shrimr brought orders back to Ibn Sa'd, which explicitly said to attack Husayn immediately if he refused allegiance. If he could not execute the orders, Ibn Sa'd was to hand command of the army to Shimr. The orders also explicated that Husayn's body was to be trampled by horses after death as he was "a rebel, a seditious person, a brigand, an oppressor."[110] It was the evening of 9th Muharram when Ibn Sa'd's army approached Husayn's camp.

Zaynab noticed the approaching army and informed Husayn. He sent some men to see what the Umayyad forces wanted. Although eager to start attack immediately, Ibn Sa'd granted Husayn's request for one night's respite. Husayn gathered his supporters and absolved them of their duty if they desired life over a certain death the following day. He said,

> I know no followers more fitting and more virtuous than my followers…All, go away with the absolution from your oath, for there will be no obligation on you from me. This is a night that will give cover to you with its darkness. Use it as a camel[111] to ride away through it…The people only want me. If they find me, they will cease searching for anyone else.[112]

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[110] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 187-188.
[111] Also narrated as "steed." See Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 188.
[112] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 115-116.

Yet, despite this allowance, all of his supporters stayed and one by one, pledged their unwavering allegiance to him saying, "if we are killed, we will have fulfilled and accomplished what we promised."[113] For the duration of the eve before battle, Husayn and his followers spent the night in prayer and reflection.

Zaynab was tending to her ill nephew, Zayn al-Abidin, when she overheard the discussions of her brother and his followers. Despite knowing his inevitable fate, she could not mask her distress at the thought of losing her brother in such a vicious manner. She approached him exclaiming, "May God accept my life for yours!" to which Husayn replied, "The blessings of Allah are upon you. Do not worry about the troubles these wretched people will cause."[114] She fainted upon hearing his words, but the Imam revived her and secured an oath from Zaynab to remain composed and not allow her grief to impair her after his death.[115] Husayn pronounced his ill son's appointment as fourth Imam. Zaynab may have been the only witness to his appointment in the tent. Throughout the night, Husayn recited a verse from the Qur'an:

> Let not those who disbelieve think our giving them a delay is better for their souls. We give them a delay only that they might increase their wickedness. They shall have disgraceful torture. God does not leave the believers in the situation you are in until he has made the evil distinct from the good.[116] {3:178-179}

Husayn recited this verse in reference to Yazid and his supporters and as we will see later, it will be repeated in the court of the caliph.

When the fateful morning of 'Ashura arrived, Husayn stood with his army of 72 men: 32 horsemen, and 40 foot soldiers to face the Umayyad army of 4,000.[117] As the

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[113] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 117.
[114] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 118.
[115] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 118. Husayn asked of Zaynab, "...so keep my oath—that you must not tear your clothes, nor scratch your face, nor cry out with grief and loss when I am destroyed."
[116] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 119.

opposition hurled insults at the Prophet's household, Husayn subdued his army's desire to respond with violence saying, "We will never start the fighting from our side."[118] He then reminded Ibn Sa'd's army of his noble birth and whose blood they were about to shed:

> Am I not the son of the daughter of your Prophet, the son of the Prophet's *wasi* and cousin...? Did not the Prophet say of me and my brother that 'they are the lords of the youth of Paradise'? You cannot deny the truth of what I have said concerning the merits of the family of Muhammad. Are all these not sufficient to prevent you from shedding my blood? If you search in the whole East and the West you will not find a grandson of the Prophet other than me.[119]

His attempts at winning their appeal and being taken for negotiations failed, as they insisted on Husayn's submission to Yazid or death.

As the battle ensued, Zaynab declared her desire to fight alongside her Imam: "O my brother, if women were permitted to fight, I would have courted death to save you. But it is not allowed. Accept therefore the sacrifice of my two young sons."[120] In fact, Zaynab allowed 'Awn and Muhammad's sacrifice despite Husayn's insistence against it.[121] The supporters of Husayn were the first to set out, followed by his family members. His own beloved son was the first to fall on the battlefield from his family, followed by Zaynab's children, and Hasan's son. Despite his offering of water to the Umayyad army the previous week, Husayn's entire camp was denied water for three consecutive days. All the men died thirsty, but the situation began to worsen, especially for the children.

Undoubtedly, all the survivors of Karbala were left scarred from the experience, especially at witnessing the death of Husayn, the last of the men to fall. After killing the

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[117] It is unclear if Hurr's army remained at the scene. In the case that they did, Husayn actually faced 5,000 men. Hurr himself switched allegiance to Husayn and fought against his former army.
[118] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 189.
[119] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 190.
[120] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 35.
[121] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 164.

supporters and family of Husayn, no one wanted to initiate the attack against the Prophet's grandson. Tabari reports, "He launched himself against those to his right until they dispersed. Then he launched himself against those to his left until they dispersed."[122] Ibn Sa'd neared Husayn when Zaynab cried out, "'Umar b. Sa'd, is Abu Abdallah[123] being killed while you watch?"[124] Ibn Sa'd turned his face from her, tears rolling down his cheeks.[125] At Shimr's urging, the cavalry launched against Husayn in a collective manner. As Husayn was visibly injured, "falling and stumbling," Sinan bin Anas bin 'Amr "cut off the head of the grandson of the Prophet in front of the tent where the women and children were watching and crying"[126] just as he prostrated himself in a last effort for his martyrdom to be accepted by God. Zaynab witnessed the beheading of her brother and returned to Zayn al-Abidin's tent to inform him of his father's death.[127] Each martyr was beheaded, their belongings "seized,"[128] their bodies stripped, and then trampled by horses as instructed by Ibn Ziyad.

After killing and beheading each of the martyrs, the army proceeded to pillage Husayn's camp. They came with full force into the tents, plundering what they could and set the tents on fire. They stole the women's belongings as well, including any jewelry. They beat the women with their spears and snatched away their veils.[129] While looting, they found Zayn al-Abidin alive. He was lying on a skin, still very ill. The skin under

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[122] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 159.
[123] *Kunya* of Husayn ibn 'Ali.
[124] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 160; Jafari, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 192.
[125] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 160.
[126] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 192.
[127] Rai, *Essential Woman* 39.
[128] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 192.
[129] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 36.

him was forcibly removed and as Shimr bin al-Djawshan approached him, Zaynab "covered him under her arms"[130] to save Zayn al-Abidin from being beheaded. Ibn Sa'd is said to have restrained Shimr as well from killing the young man who had just entered his position of Imam. The survivors of the battle were taken captive by the Umayyad army and were made to leave for Kufa the next day.

Upon leaving the desert of Karbala for Kufa, the women and children saw "the bodies of the martyrs lying naked and trampled. The enemy had not buried Husayn and his supporters, although they had buried their own dead."[131] Both Zaynab and Zayn al-Abidin displayed their grief at this sight. The strength of Zaynab's words is reflected at this moment as she passed the body of her brother, still showing signs of his last prostration. One of Yazid's soldiers overheard her exclaim,

> 'O Muhammad...Here is Husayn in the open, stained with blood and with limbs torn off. O Muhammad! Your daughters are prisoners, your progeny are killed, and the east wind blows dust over them.' By God! She made every enemy and friend weep.[132]

The captives were made to ride on camels without saddles and in front of them, the army displayed the heads of the martyrs on spears[133] save the head of Husayn, which had been sent to Ibn Ziyad the night before.[134]

The people of Kufa were told to prepare for a festival, as a rebel group was being led to the governor of their city. Spectators quickly gathered to jeer the captives, but "With awe and terror, the people looked at the handcuffed women and children and

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[130] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 192.
[131] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 192.
[132] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 164.
[133] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 40.
[134] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 163.

wanted to know who they were."[135] One of the women in the crowd recognized Zaynab from her classes and ran home to grab sheets to veil the women, but the Umayyad army did not allow the unveiled survivors to be covered. Seeing the people of Kufa weep over their failed support for the Imam, Zaynab bade them quiet and delivered a fierce sermon, likening their broken oath to killing Husayn themselves:

> ...you have earned the shame of killing the Imam of the age. The stain of his blood is now on your clothes and you cannot remove it, nor can you secure acquittal from the charge of killing the son of the last Prophet of Allah, the Chief of the youths in Paradise. You have killed a person who was your support, the knower of the Sunnah and the ultimate arbitrator at the time of your mutual disputations.[136]

After Zaynab condemned the weak faith of the people of Kufa, the caravan was taken into the governor's compound. When facing Ibn Ziyad, a battle of words ensued between Zaynab and the powerful governor as to the ramifications of Husayn's actions: whether he and his followers were murdered or martyred.

> Ubaydallah said to her, 'Praise be to God, Who has disgraced you, killed you and revealed the false nature of your claims.' Zaynab replied, 'Praise be to God, Who has favored us with Muhammad and has purified us completely from sin. It is not as you say, for He only disgraces the great sinner and reveals the false nature of the profligate.'[137]

Following the physical assault at Karbala, Zaynab stood composed and articulate against the verbal assault from Ibn Ziyad. He continued to question Zaynab, who defended her brother by using the Qur'an and the Day of Judgment as her weapons:

> [Ibn Ziyad] asked, 'How do you consider God has treated your family?' She replied, 'God decreed death for them, and they went forward to their resting places. God will gather you and us together. You will plead your excuses to Him and we will be your adversaries before Him.' Ibn Ziyad became enraged and burnt with anger.[138]

Zaynab did not allow Ibn Ziyad to forget which family he perpetrated.

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[135] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 11.
[136] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 41-43.
[137] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk*165-166.
[138] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 166.

Following his ordeal with Zaynab, Ibn Ziyad noticed Zayn al-Abidin still alive despite reaching "the status of a man."[139] He explicitly ordered that he be beheaded and for another man to look after the women but once again, Zaynab intervened on behalf of her nephew:

> Zaynab, his aunt, clung to him and pleaded, 'O Ibn Ziyad haven't you had enough of us? Have you not sated yourself with our blood? Will you let any of us survive?' She embraced 'Ali and continued, 'I plead to you by God if you are a believer, that if you kill him, you kill me with him'...Ibn Ziyad looked at Zaynab for a time and then he looked at the people and said, 'How wonderful is kinship! By God! I think that she really wants me to kill her with him, if I kill him. Leave the boy...Go with your women.'[140]

For a second time, Zaynab saved the life of her Imam. The captives were taken to a prison where they were to reside until leaving for Damascus to meet with Yazid. During that time, Ibn Ziyad kept the head of Husayn on display within his compound and around Kufa[141] before sending it with a messenger to Damascus. Zayn al-Abidin was put in chains[142] and the women and children were tied in ropes when taken to meet Yazid.

The caravan left Kufa in the beginning of Safar for Yazid's compound in Damascus, some six hundred miles away. The captives were harshly treated throughout the journey and many children died on the way there.[143] Twenty-eight days later, the caravan reached Damascus. They were led into the city in ropes and were again paraded through the streets and bazaars without veils and were harassed by crowds. A popular bazaar in Damascus is particularly notorious for its treatment of the women and children. Popular liturgy holds that it took the caravan three days to cross the area of several hundred feet. Finally, the surviving members of the Prophet's household entered the

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[139] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 166.
[140] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 167.
[141] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 168.
[142] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 169.
[143] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 44.

center of power and authority, the caliph's palace. Following the transgression of justice and humanity at Karbala, justice was about to find its ultimate refuge in the voice of Zaynab.

CHAPTER THREE: PRINCESS OF MARTYRS

"The history of Karbala is based on two pillars: the rising of Imam Hussein (a.s.) and the rising of Zainab (a.s.)"[144]

Upon seeing the captives enter his court, Yazid invokes his ancestors and undermines not only Husayn, but the Prophet himself: "O Husayn! You have paid the price of your revolt…My ancestors who were killed at Badr[145] have been avenged today. Now it is clear that the Bani Hashim had just staged a play to gain power and there was never any divine revelation."[146] Zaynab stands to respond to Yazid. Remaining composed and eloquent, she begins by praising God, making clear that her faith has not dropped in the slightest. She challenges the caliph of Muslims about his actions, "Is this your conscience, mercy, justice and Islam, O Yazid?" and undermines his claim of vengeance by calling attention to his dubious ancestry, as Bani Umayya was well-known to hold enmity with the Prophet. She asks, "what more can be expected from someone whose ancestress tore the liver of a great man with her teeth and sucked his blood; someone whose flesh and blood is grown out of the blood of martyrs."[147] The "ancestress" Zaynab refers to is none other than Yazid's paternal grandmother, Hind bint 'Utba, who ate the liver of the Prophet's uncle Hamza following the Battle of Uhud.[148] Being of a lineage that disrespected martyrdom in such a vile way, Yazid is unable to appreciate the sacrifice of righteousness made by Husayn. Hind's desecration of the dead

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[144] *Muhjubah*, 15:7 (1996): 29. "A.S." stands for *'alayhis salaam* or "upon whom be peace."
[145] F. Buhl, "Hind Bint Utba b. Rabīa," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman et al (Brill 2008) Boston University 18 April 2008 <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-2881>. Yazid's great grandfather, 'Utba was killed at the Battle of Badr by Hamza, uncle of Prophet Muhammad. Hind took revenge against her father's killer at the Battle of Uhud by biting the liver of the dead Hamza.
[146] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 48.
[147] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 24.
[148] Buhl, EI^2.

is repeating itself through Yazid, but this time not just one martyr is violated, but seventy-two.

Zaynab addresses each of Yazid's assertions, from his ridicule of Husayn to undermining the Prophet through quoting the Qur'an by memory. In reference to Yazid's claim that Husayn staged a "revolt" and fell defeated she says, "O Yazid, Allah says, and his word is true, that: 'Then evil was the end of those who did evil because they rejected the communications of Allah and used to mock them.'"[149] {30:10} The Qur'an defines evil as those who reject the Signs of God and mock the ones sent to provide guidance, a fitting description for Yazid. She continues, "It is astonishing that the party of the nobles and chaste who are the true party of Allah must be killed at the hands of the party of Satan who are the liberated slaves of the conquest of Meccah."[150] Zaynab proves her historical knowledge of both tribes, as her grandfather released Yazid's paternal grandfather, Abu Sufyan, from certain enslavement following his defeat at the Battle of Badr.[151]

The caliph secured certain chastisement in the afterlife: "O Yazid! You believe you have skinned us and tore our flesh into pieces. But you are mistaken. You have stained yourself and cut your own flesh into pieces."[152] By ordering the physical slaughter of Husayn, Zaynab reassures Yazid that he in fact inflicted those tortures upon himself, as Husayn received martyrdom while Yazid earned damnation. She asks that God give the caliph his due punishment and warns him as she did with Ibn Ziyad that

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[149] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 28.
[150] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 28.
[151] W. Montgomery Watt, "Khadidja," *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* ed. P. Bearman et al (Brill 2008) 18 April 2008 <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-4116>.
[152] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 26.

"The day will come when you will shamefully stand before the Messenger of God and will not know what answer to give for shedding the blood of [his] offspring." [153] The Prophet will witness for Husayn on the Day of Judgment and turn Yazid into a witness of his own destruction: "On that day you will witness that the Exalted God will gather us together and...avenge our rights on you and your supporters."[154] Yazid's reckless behavior was well known, but by ordering the slaughter Husayn, he not only "implicated [himself] in this great crime"[155] by making undeniable the side of truth and the side of falsehood, but publicly exposes his character better than anyone else could have.

The daughter of 'Ali and Fatima also addresses Yazid's claim that God would have spared Husayn if he was right. She tells him, "O Yazid! Come to your sense and do not forget that in the Holy Quran the fate of you and the likes of you is as such 'And let not those who disbelieve think that our granting them respite is better for their souls: we grant them respite only that they may add to their sins; and they shall have a disgraceful chastisement."[156] This is the same verse that Husayn repeated during the eve of 'Ashura, and now it is Zaynab's turn to repeat this verse in the caliph's court. She also says, "The just God will soon pass judgment on your actions...and those who helped you in this crime will soon realize that among the oppressors they have chosen the worst."[157] Of all the tyrants in history, Yazid is the most heinous, rendering Karbala the greatest of all transgressions and tragedies.

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[153] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 26.
[154] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 26.
[155] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 24.
[156] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 22.
[157] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 28.

As she defends her family's efforts to preserve Islam in Yazid's court, Zaynab says she will "take our case to the court of Allah and rely on him."[158] Leaving her affairs to God, the highest authority, she entrusts the caliph's fate to His judgment. She tells Yazid that he has "uprooted us completely,"[159] a possible reference to her dream of the tree where Husayn was the last twig that slipped out of little Zaynab's hand. Not only was Yazid responsible for killing her brother, but his "face reflects pleasure and happiness"[160] as he hit the head of Husayn with his cane, despite it being the same face the Prophet used to kiss.

Zaynab is sure to show that despite their experience, her faith in God was not diminished in any way. In fact, she says God is "the Most Merciful, the Most Kind,"[161] and praises Him as "The same God who established our beginning with happiness and prosperity and in the end honoured us with martyrdom and his endless blessing." Due to the oppressive nature of the caliph toward the martyrs and their surviving relatives, God "will increase the rewards of the martyrs."[162] Zaynab assures Yazid that the efforts of the *Ahl al-Bayt* to maintain the religion of God and His Prophet will never fade:

> We will not deviate from our righteous path under the pressures of your oppression and deception whatever it may be and whatever you may do. You will not be able to obliterate our name for our message and divine mission cannot be destroyed just as your shamed and disgrace cannot be washed clean.[163]

Here, Zaynab establishes that the remembrance of Karbala is directly parallel to the disgrace and sin that Yazid brought upon himself. Just as the martyrs shall never be forgotten, the caliph's actions will never be forgotten. Zaynab is determined to ensure

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[158] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 28.
[159] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 50.
[160] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 50.
[161] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 28.
[162] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 30.
[163] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 30.

the survival of Islam. She physically protected the Imam, guide for Muslims to truth and righteousness, and soon it will be time for her to establish a timeless method to preserve Islam. She literally saved Imamate from severance in court; the same court will host the initiation of the traditions that will figuratively save Imamate for generations to come.

Just as was done in Kufa, "Again, in Damascus, Zaynab's forthright and impassioned telling of the Karbala story gained sympathy and generated unrest."[164] What Yazid might have considered a small political ordeal turned into a revolution within his domain, particularly among those who revered the Prophet's household. As news spread throughout the community about Zaynab's confrontation with Yazid and the maltreatment of the beloved family of the Prophet, rumors simmered about a possible revolt. The caliph granted the captives amnesty to avert political upheaval.[165] When informing them of their impending release, Yazid asked Zayn al-Abidin if he had any requests before leaving Damascus. The fourth Imam conceded to Zaynab who simply said, "since the day our leader and our chief Husayn was butchered we have not had any opportunity to mourn for him."[166] Because Husayn's army was left unburied under the burning sun, the martyrs had not received proper burial, let alone a proper funeral. Moreover, the Umayyad army prohibited mourning over Husayn and his supporters throughout their captivity.[167]

Thus, at Zaynab's request, the first gathering of mourning was held in Yazid's compound, the same compound where the conspiracy against Husayn was born. Where

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[164] D'Souza, "The Figure of Zaynab in Shi'i Devotional Life" 213.
[165] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 54.
[166] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 54.
[167] Shahin, *Lady Zaynab* 214. Zayn al-Abidin said "The policemen's spears would fall down on the head of anyone of us who would shed even a single tear."

she once stood impossibly strong, Zaynab and the other captives were finally allowed to relieve their sorrow. Zaynab's "submission was divine, yet her lamentation poignantly human,"[168] as she recounted the loss of her loved ones. The story of the Prophet's grandson was so sorrowful that all of Yazid's women participated in the *majlis* as well,[169] coming "with tears and weeping for al-Husayn."[170] They held lamentations for the fallen at Karbala for three days.

Other women who attended the ceremonies learned of what took place during and after battle and relayed the information back to their male relatives.[171] Through this initial network of women, the firsthand account of Karbala spread to the rest of the Muslim community. The narrations of the battle and subsequent captivity stirred further political dissidence prompting the immediate release of the survivors, approximately one year after their detainment. On their way back to Medina, the caravan stopped at Karbala and held an emotional *majlis* ceremony reliving the deaths of their loved ones. Zaynab declared that she wanted to remain in the desert until her death, but Zayn al-Abidin pleaded with his aunt to stay with them.[172] Upon learning that the caravan was returning back to their home, the people of Medina "came out in droves"[173] and once again Zaynab recounted the events of Karbala and their imprisonment.

The impact of Zaynab's traditions is clear as they prompted the captives' release from Damascus, but they also carry an important spiritual significance as they preserve

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[168] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 61.
[169] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 174.
[170] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 172.
[171] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 55.
[172] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 58.
[173] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 58.

the meaning of *jihad* and *shahadah* for the Islamic community by perpetuating the paradigm of Husayn, Prince of Martyrs. When testifying in Yazid's court, Zaynab powerfully asserts, "You will not be able to obliterate our name for our message and divine message cannot be destroyed." It is through Zaynab's remembrance ceremonies that her assertion materializes.

The remembrance and mourning traditions preserve the martyr paradigms of Husayn and Zaynab and allow devotees access to their models. Through Karbala, the community not only receives an example of physical *jihad* and *shahadat*, but how to live as a *mujahid* throughout one's life. In the Shi'i tradition, the physical *jihad* is not complete without the internal *jihad al-akbar* that may manifest itself in righteous battle. As God's chosen leaders of mankind, the *Ahl al-Bayt* are the greatest of all examples for both the internal and external struggles, and it is the *majlis* tradition that grants access to the greatest guides. For at least a millennium,[174] Zaynab's traditions have retained the story of Karbala for Muslims to learn about struggle and martyrdom *fi sabil Allah.*

Husayn ibn 'Ali: Prince of Martyrs

It is telling that "In Shi'ite Islam the *shahid* model or paradigm finds its ultimate expression in the figure of Imam Husayn bin 'Ali."[175] It indicates the theological meaning of martyrdom, as "Models...speak about the reality of that religion or ideology."[176] Husayn's example stands as the measure of martyrs in Islamic history and "influences, shapes, and even supersedes all those martyrs proceeding him."[177]

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[174] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 170.
[175] Husted, "Karbala Made Immediate" 265.
[176] Husted, "Karbala Made Immediate" 268.
[177] Husted, "Karbala Made Immediate" 265.

Husayn's extraordinary struggle in the way of God has won him universal appeal as he is "regarded by Muslims, Sunni as well as Shi'ite, as the model for self-sacrifice in the way of God, a revolt against wrong-doing and oppression. This fact has not been fully appreciated by Most Western historians." [178] In fact, there remains a discrepancy between Western and Islamic scholarship in how the memory of Karbala is recorded. Bringing these alternate opinions of Husayn to light and juxtaposing them to the historical record is essential to understanding Husayn's status as Prince of Martyrs.

The entry for "Karbala" in the Oxford Dictionary of Islam holds Husayn accountable for the battle:

> The Umayyads had come to power on 'Ali's assassination and the abdication of his elder son Hasan (661), but Husayn seems to have felt that he had a right to the throne through hereditary succession and, as his later partisans, the Shi'a, were to maintain, through divine designation. Husayn refused allegiance to Yazid in 680 and raised a revolt with some 50 supporters. The actual battle, on 10 October, seems to have been merely a series of skirmishes but Husayn was killed. The event had a disproportionate significance, since Husayn's fate aroused widespread sympathy among many Muslims.[179]

The author does not mention that Yazid also came to power through hereditary succession, and a dubious one at that. Often, Husayn is portrayed as a rebel and more violent than his brother, Hasan, since the latter signed a treaty that averted military confrontation. However, this ignores the fact that Husayn entered his Imamate as soon as Hasan was martyred and lived under Mu'awiyah's reign for a decade without any combat: "this same Imam Husayn, who refused to pay allegiance to Yazid for one day, lived for ten years under the rule of Mu'awiyah."[180] Additionally, Husayn continually

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[178] Ayoub, *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 874-875.
[179] C.E. Bosworth, "Karbala', battle of," *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, Ed. Richard Holmes (Oxford University Press 2001) 8 November 2007 <www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t139.e664>.
[180] Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, 200.

asked to be taken for negations even until the morning of 'Ashura.[181] This shows that there was not a discrepancy on the Imams' end but rather, there must have been a difference in the caliphs' political policy.

Yazid bin Mu'awiyah not only publicly broke Islamic laws, but claimed the revelation to Muhammad was a false message[182] and "Now this same Yazid had become the head of the Muslim community and was asking Husayn to accept his authority."[183] The manner in which Yazid was collecting allegiance went beyond simple quietism; it would have been an endorsement of his way of life[184] and his abandonment of the *Sunnah*. Husayn's allegiance to Yazid would render all influential personalities of the time subject to his whims. This would have endangered Islam by allowing Yazid to set the norm for Islamic practice, a certain departure from the Islam of Muhammad.

The system that Yazid founded was different than those of his past "for Yazid not only showed no respect for Islam and its injunctions but also made a public demonstration of impudently treading under foot its basis and its laws. Those before him, even if they had opposed religious injunction always did so in the guise of religion, and at least formally respected religion."[185] Considering Hasan's correspondence with Mu'awiyah, we see that the Imams were discontent about the caliph's insistence on maintaining power, but that Islam was not in immediate jeopardy. However, Mu'awiyah's ascension did cause some concern for Hasan: "You do not possess any

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[181] Ayoub, *Encyclopedia Iranica* 874.
[182] S.H.M. Jafri, "The Imam Husayn's Concepts of Religion and Leadership," *Al-Serat* 11:1 <http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/>.
[183] Jafri, "Concepts of Religion and Leadership."
[184] Jafri, "Concepts of Religion and Leadership."
[185] Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam* 200.

known merit in religion (*din*), nor have you any trace (*athar*) in Islam which has ever been praised."[186] While Mu'awiyah's caliphate signaled a transitional period, Yazid's appointment solidified the change: "thereafter the caliphate lost its original character…the caliph was regarded more as a king than a caliph in the original sense of the word."[187] Under Yazid, the religion of Muhammad was in clear jeopardy as Husayn tells the Umayyad army, "Can you not see that truth is no longer something that men practice and falsehood is no longer desisted from..."[188] Thus, concern for the fate of Islam is what prevented Husayn from acknowledging Yazid, and why he is credited with saving his grandfather's religion.

Establishing a paradigm means affecting broader society with the martyr's struggle and death. Yazid's ultimatum provided a platform for setting an example to maintain truth at any cost, while the previous caliph did not. In Shi'i understanding, the treaty was the best option for Hasan and Husayn under Mu'awiyah: "…if Imam Hasan or Imam Husayn had fought Mu'awiyah they would have been killed without there being the least benefit for Islam."[189] This illustrates that a social revolution, or at the very least, a revolution in the hearts and minds of Muslims is the desired end of martyrdom. In this way, the community can identify the side of righteousness. Even Zaynab tells Yazid, "without considering yourself guilty of this great crime you have implicated yourself in this crime."[190] Husayn's martyrdom was essential to expose the danger Yazid posed for

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[186] Jafari, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 180.
[187] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 93-94.
[188] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 96.
[189] Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam* 200.
[190] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 24.

the Muslim community and to distinguish between truth and falsehood, especially when falsehood captured such an influential position.

Further, the claim that Husayn was seeking the "throne," implying political authority is contrary to Husayn's actions leading up to the Battle of Karbala. Husayn only left upon receiving invitations from Kufa. There is no evidence that he sought support himself or that he attempted to collect military strength[191] on his way to Kufa, despite enjoying a welcoming stay in Mecca: "In the six-month period before the battle of Karbala', Husayn did nothing to consolidate his strength and military power."[192] After leaving Medina, some joined Husayn's band from Mecca and even switched allegiance to his side at Karbala, including Hurr, but they did so out of their own volition. Historical accounts indicate that Husayn's stand at Karbala was beyond an altercation of politics; throughout this period he was "preparing himself for a different strategy of revolution."[193]

Rather than heading directly to battle, Husayn attempted to see the caliph several times, but "'Omar b. Sa'd, put the choice to Husayn and his followers of either surrendering to the authority of Ebn Ziyad or fighting."[194] His actions imply that he had a different intent than a rebellion. His stand was not about power but "a much higher goal than simply accession to the caliphate, the term given to temporal authority in

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[191] Sayyid Wahid Akhtar, "Karbala', An Enduring Paradigm of Islamic Revivalism," Al-*Tawhid*, 13.1 (Spring 1996): 23 January 2008 <http://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/paradigm-akhtar.htm>.
The family of the Prophet held great reverence and support in the Hejaz suggesting that Husayn could have easily gained their military might if he sought it out.
[192] Jafari, "Concept of Religion and Leadership."
[193] Jafari, "Concept of Religion and Leadership."
[194] Ayoub, *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 875.

Islam,"[195] it was for an eternal purpose. Those who wanted a return to religion requested his presence and he answered the call out of religious obligation.[196] His correspondence with the people clearly explicates his intention: "I call you to the Book of God and the *Sunna* of his prophet…if you listen to me and obey my order I will guide you to the right path."[197] Additionally, Tabari tells us that on the eve of 'Ashura, Husayn absolved his supporters of their obligation to follow him into combat.[198] Clearly, his actions would have differed if he was seeking political power and a temporal victory.

Coming under the rule of Yazid, the Muslim community "needed a shaking and jolting of hearts and feelings. This, he decided, could only be achieved through sacrifice and suffering, and therefore, in order to save Islam and its values, and the freedom of man and his dignity, Husayn made one of the greatest sacrifices in human history."[199] Additionally, "If rulers are overthrown but the system remains unaltered, nothing is gained."[200] Despite the continuance of Yazid's reign after Karbala, Husayn's stance preserved Islam. Muslims never forgot (and indeed, they still have not forgotten) Husayn's death and were able to decipher between Yazid's independent actions and appropriate religious conduct. This was Imam Husayn's *jihad*, to save the Islam of his grandfather from being changed by a temporal ruler.

Karbala can be seen as a battle between divine right and worldly power at first glance, but Husayn's determination did not stem from a desire to impose his religious

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[195] Jafari, "Concept of Religion and Leadership."
[196] Apparent in Husayn's reply sent with Muslim b. 'Aqil.
[197] Jafari, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 180.
[198] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 115-116.
[199] Jafari, "Concept of Religion and Leadership."
[200] Jafari, "Concept of Religion and Leadership."

authority on the community. At his encounter with Hurr, Husayn tells the Kufians, "[if you] are averse to my coming, I will leave you for the place from which I came to you."[201] Husayn refused to give allegiance "for the sake of this unity in faith and commitment (Islam) to God and the truth…He refused a partisan Islam when he refused to legitimize Umayyad rule."[202] Husayn saved Islam for all Muslims and both Sunnis and Shi'ites fought on his side at Karbala including Zuhayr b. al-Qayn, a prominent supporter of 'Uthman ibn Affan.[203]

With his willingness to go back to his home and avoid bloodshed, Husayn also shows the humane dimension that factors into his paradigm of martyrdom. At his initial encounter with the Umayyad army, he orders his men to give water to the opposition to quench their thirst. His repeat efforts at negotiations and refusal to begin attack on 'Ashura show his desire for peaceful resolutions. His care of his sister the night before battle shows regard for his family, not to mention the heartfelt sorrow he displayed as his relatives and friends fell on the battlefield.[204] The compassionate side of Husayn shows that *jihad* is not a struggle that is detrimental to humanity, but one that enjoins benevolence and righteousness on mankind.

Husayn also stands out as a victim of a concerted campaign that was waged against him, those who supported him, and even those who were "suspected"[205] to

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[201] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 93.
[202] Ayoub, "The Excellences of the Imam Husayn."
[203] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 114.
[204] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 150-156.
[205] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 183.Upon securing the governance of Kufa, Ibn Ziyad ordered the beheading of anyone who was suspected of aligning with Husayn without trial.

support him.[206] This makes his example more sympathetic, but also more impressive, as he stood against an army exponentially superior to his own with most of his opposition having once pledged their support to him. Indeed, the oppressive circumstances surrounding Husayn made his *jihad* particularly difficult which makes his example resonate in a special way in the hearts of those who remember him as the Prince of Martyrs.

Husayn has "traditionally been regarded as having sacrificed himself in order to revive the Prophet's religion and save it from destruction; yet [he is also] to be emulated for his willingness to fight for justice against all odds."[207] Husayn is a *mujahid* for his willingness to set down his life in battle, but also for successfully embodying the daily *jihad* of every Muslim to enjoin truth and righteousness. Moreover, "Husayn ('a) initiated a movement that proved to be an archetype representing an eternal struggle of truth against falsehood, justice against injustice."[208] He cites the principle of Imamate as enjoining righteousness and providing an avenue to authentic religion: "the Imam is only one who follows the Book of God, makes justice and honesty his conduct and behaviour, judges with truth, and devotes himself to the service of God."[209] As Imam, establishing truth was Husayn's primary goal.

Not only is the tragedy of Karbala remembered, but the cause of justice and truth that Husayn and his 71 supporters died for. Through Zaynab's *majlis* ceremonies, Husayn's paradigm of martyrdom is revisited every year by all who commemorate him,

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[206] Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* 57.
[207] Kohlberg, EI^2.
[208] Akhtar, "Karbala', An Enduring Paradigm of Islamic Revivalism."
[209] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 176.

reminding them of the meaning and method of becoming a martyr in Islam. Zaynab's model lays the foundation for his paradigm's continuance, while Husayn's paradigm affirms her martyrdom. They are mutually inclusive and interdependent, and complement each other's struggle. Now that Husayn's struggle has been explored, we may turn our sights to Zaynab's struggle *fi sabil Allah*.

Princess of Martyrs: The Paradigm of Zaynab bint 'Ali

At Karbala, the last of the *Ahl al-Kisa* was killed. As the surviving witness to the events in these individuals' lives, "It is up to Zaynab to proclaim the message of her parents and brothers loudly and clearly."[210] The *Ahl al-Bayt* had suffered injustice that had not been popularly acknowledged: Fatima's denied inheritance, the usurpation of 'Ali's caliphate, Hasan's murder. All of these events could have gone unrecognized, but the occurrence and ramifications of Karbala were undeniable as through this battle, "an alternative Islamic history is invoked"[211] which includes the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their continuous struggle for the sake of Islam. As a witness to Husayn's death and what had befallen the *Ahl al-Bayt*, it is suitable that Zaynab is the one to represent them and testify on their behalf. There stands no usurper more vicious or ruthless than Yazid, so it is appropriate that the pinnacle of falsehood, injustice, and evil be confronted by Zaynab, knower of truth, justice, and righteousness.

Despite Husayn's repeated efforts to meet with the caliph, his request was never granted. Thus, Zaynab serves the first physical encounter between Yazid and the Prophet's household. Additionally, Zaynab may be the only eyewitness to Husayn's

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[210] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 166.
[211] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 166.

death that testified to Yazid[212] as due to his illness, Zayn al-Abidin was resting in his tent. Following Karbala, the ultimate culmination of injustice, Zaynab's testimony is the definitive restoration of justice. Zaynab's testimony is particularly striking because in addition to denouncing the actions of Yazid and Ibn Ziyad's forces, she exposes the illegitimacy of their leadership and combats their claims with references to history and the Qur'an. She maintains that her family is the most deserving of authority as it was a right endowed by God. Through her words, she is "metaphorically turning Damascus into a variant of Karbala" [213] as Yazid's court gives another platform to rally for the truth. Combat served as the physical battle against Yazid while Zaynab wages an ideological battle: "Husain's martyrdom and his physical combat are reinforced through Zainab's subsequent confrontation with Yazid; her battle is with words and deeds."[214] Her struggle to establish truth necessarily differs from her brother as she cannot physically fight. Rather, she provides the first physical encounter between Yazid and the *Ahl al-Bayt.* Zaynab's *jihad* is to confront her oppressor and recount the injustice committed against her family and the religion of Islam to successfully complete her mission.

As the "partner of Husayn," Zaynab "is what Husayn is. Wherever Husayn is, Zaynab is. And where Husayn left off, Zaynab took over. The episode of Karbala would not be complete without Zaynab."[215] Syed Hyder Akbar cites a famous Urdu orator, Rashid Torabi, that also attributes Zaynab with completing the message of others. In one

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[212] Most reports say that Umm Kulthum, Zaynab's sister, also gave a sermon at Damascus. She probably witnessed the martyrdom as well. Pinault, *Horse of Karbala* 82.
[213] Hyder, *Reliving Karbala* 95.
[214] Hyder, *Reliving Karbala* 95.
[215] D'Souza, "The Figure of Zaynab in Shi'i Devotional Life" 209.

of his *majlis* elegies, Torabi tells his audience that three sermons in history are unforgettable: those of Fatima al-Zehra, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, and Zaynab bint 'Ali: "If Fatemeh's *khotbeh* (sermon) was incomplete, Ali completed it. If Ali's *khotbeh* was incomplete, then Zaynab completed it."[216] The two former personalities undoubtedly left an impression on the Muslim community then and now, but Zaynab's piercing words transcend in an unparalleled fashion, as they follow the greatest tragedy that befell the Prophet's household.

Indeed, the sister of Husayn carried on his message to her surrounding communities after his death, when his cause for Islam was brutally taken out by a militarily superior opposition. Zaynab not only witnessed the event, but was in close contact with her brother in the time leading up to battle. She knew of Husayn's efforts for negotiations and was near the men's quarters as she was caring for Zayn al-Abidin during his illness. Zaynab's proximity to those with religious authority throughout her life renders her cognizant of what Islam is and what must be done to preserve its teachings, especially through preserving the Imamate.

The Imams are the source of divine guidance after the Prophet which is why Zaynab not only supported Husayn's sacrifice, but also risked her life to save the fourth Imam. At first glance, it seems that Zaynab saves Zayn al-Abidin out of an aunt's love for her nephew. However, one should consider why Zaynab did not throw herself over her own sons, or Husayn and his son, 'Ali Akbar, as she cared for them as though they were her children.

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[216] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 165. Notably, two of these three orators are women.

Zayn al-Abidin had the unique position of being the next Imam but was too incapacitated by his illness to defend himself, leaving Zaynab to ensure his survival. By saving his life, Zaynab preserved the Imamate and left an heir to carry it on.[217] Zaynab's plea to kill her along with her Imam is reminiscent of the pledges given to Husayn by his followers the night before combat.[218] She not only pleaded with his potential assassins, but placed herself twice between her nephew and the weapon, risking her own life to save his. This action embodies Ezzati's description of a *shahid* as one who "stands ready to fight for the truth and to defend it at all costs, even at the cost of his own life."[219] Already having mentioned the utmost importance of leadership in Shi'ism, Zaynab's act of saving her nephew is beyond an act of altruism, it is an act of salvation for humanity.

Looking back at Ezzati's description of a martyr, Zaynab clearly fulfills the first requirements of witnessing and testimony. In addition to this, Ezzati argues that if one "is prepared to struggle and fight and give up his life for the truth" he can become a martyr. Zaynab proves she is willing to give her life for the sake of her religion when she places herself between her nephew and his potential killers not once, but twice. As established, divine authority is the linchpin of truth in Shi'i belief and as the Imam of the time, Zayn al-Abidin's life had to be preserved to protect Islam.

Her care for the next Imam began before his role as leader commenced, as she was tending to him on the night before battle.[220] It is interesting that she was the one to

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[217] "Zayn al-Abidin, Ali," ed. John L. Esposito, *Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (Oxford University Press 2003) 8 November 2007 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview-Main&entry=t125.e2568>.
[218] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 115-116.
[219] Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom."
[220] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 117.

care for her nephew even though his own mother was present,[221] indicating that there must be something special about Zaynab and her proximity to the Imams. After all, she was named in the same ceremony as her two brothers[222] and truly displays many characteristics as her Imams. In Yazid's court, she reiterates the same verse of the Qur'an that her brother recited the night before his death[223] and "Zaynab and 'Ali [Zayn al-Abidin] replied in a similar manner"[224] to the caliph, indicating that her thoughts and speech were in line with the fourth Imam.

Within a few short hours at Karbala, whole families transformed into widows, orphans, and childless mothers and it was Zaynab, who at the oath of her brother, was charged with gathering the survivors that fled the burning tents. Although not his official successor, Zaynab displays Imam-like actions following the combat at Karbala: "Upon Husain's death his sister succeeded him, if not as a religious leader, at least as Imamic regent, protecting the life of the fourth Imam Zayn al-Abidin during the spiritual interregnum until Zayn al-Abidin's health was restored and he could assume his hereditary leadership role as Imam."[225] Her actions after battle were essential to the maintenance of the religion her brother died for.

Husayn is seen as the savior of Islam by laying down his life to defend the *Sunnah* of his grandfather. Yet, his cause could have perished with the martyrs if it was not for the survivors who carried on his message. The survivors as a whole are pivotal in

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[221] Peter Chelkowski, "Hosayn B. 'Ali B. Abi Talieb, Abu Abd-allah," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 2004) 493.
[222] D'Souza, "The Figure of Zaynab in Shi'i Devotional Life" 207-208.
[223] Qur'an {3:178}.
[224] Veccia, EI^2.
[225] Pinault, *Horse of Karbala* 83.

this manner, but Zaynab stands prominent among them because of her testimony and the method she institutionalized to remember the message of Husayn. Although Zaynab did not fight with a sword or die on the battlefield, her bold testimony to the governor and caliph of the time undermined every reason they had to justify her brother's killing. Hyder cites 20th century Shi'i scholar, Ali Naqvi, who considers Zaynab's victory as no different than a military defeat of Yazid: "can any person hesitate to say that the stations that she passed were more difficult than the station that was crossed by the friends of the Prince of Martyrs?...She is the voice of truth in the face of tyrannical government and an oppressive sultanate—Can there be any doubt that each and every sentence of [Zaynab's speech] was more brutal for Yazid than the wounds wrought by thousands of swords and spears?"[226] In addition to being held at the same station as a physical *mujahid* with her speech, Naqvi maintains that the difficulties she and the other survivors endured were as painful and tragic as being slaughtered on the desert sands.

Hyder also quotes Valid Akhtar, a scholar who asserts that Zaynab's *jihad* was greater than her brother's in theory and practice, and her testimony imposed more damage on the caliphate of Yazid than any uprising could: "The tongue of Zaynab accomplished a greater task than the swords of Husayn and Abbas...at all of these instances if there was a sword that was raised and then struck the heads of oppression and falsehood, it was either the sword of Zaynab's sermons or the miracle of the tongue of the fourth Imam."[227] It is for her brave retelling of her brother's cause in the courts

[226] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 169.
[227] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 174.

and beyond that earns her the title of "the heroine of Karbala"[228] as she solidifies Karbala's memory in history and immortalizes the martyrs' struggle for truth.

The last part of the martyrdom cycle is establishing a paradigm, "an example for others, worthy of being copied and worthy of being followed." Zaynab's *jihad* and ultimately, her *shahadat* presents a unique ideal for others to emulate as it is a struggle that all can participate in. Her *jihad al-akbar* most notably took form in her testimony in court, which defended Islam and hence the religion's ideals of truth and justice. Conscientious Muslims can struggle *fi sabil Allah* in their daily lives, whether it is through polemic, teaching, or testimony. Wayne Husted highlights martyrs in Shi'i history that were executed for not renouncing their beliefs. Husted invokes the paradigm set by Husayn, but in fact, these martyrs fit more readily into Zaynab's paradigm of martyrdom, indicating her model's importance for the Shi'i and their understanding of *shahadah*.

Husted's enumerated martyrs were executed for propagating their beliefs about the Imams[229] which follows Zaynab's example where "physical battles are replaced by the battle of words. She leads Islam on a new path by accomplishing in the palaces of Kufa and Damascus a nonviolent victory."[230] Her "swordless war"[231] sets the standard for followers of the *Ahl al-Bayt* to express their beliefs and traditions in a patient yet effective way. Hyder argues that "women can complement the struggle of men through the waging of their own war. While this battle may be fought without a sword, it can be

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[228] "Ali Zayn al-Abidin," *Oxford Dictionary of Islam.*
[229] Husted, "Karbala Made Immediate" 265.
[230] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 172.
[231] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 168.

just as forceful through moving oratory and with patience."[232] Although I agree with this statement, it is valuable to point out that the Shi'i tradition prohibits declarations of physical *jihad*, at least formally, in the absence of the twelfth Imam who has been in occultation since 941 C.E. Particularly because physical *jihad* is not currently viable, Zaynab presents an alternative but legitimate model of martyrdom which pushes the greater *jihad* to the fore to establish truth and justice. Thus, both men and women benefit from Zaynab's paradigm as a feasible method of struggle and death *fi sabil Allah*.

Majalis: Traditions of Remembrance

Yazid's orders at Karbala sparked concern among the people, but the exchange between the caliph and Zaynab made his transgression undeniable as she tells him, "O Yazid, whatever you have done proves your revolt against Allah and your denial of His Prophet and the Book and Sunnah that the Holy Prophet brought from Allah."[233] With the intent to keep the story of Karbala alive in the community, Zaynab's efforts are essential in keeping the message of Husayn circulating, as she held *majalis* every time her caravan stopped on the way back to Medina. Whenever people came to meet her at her home, she recounted what befell her brother and his supporters. Without martyrdom, Husayn "could not have become the paradigm of selfless sacrifice"[234] and it is through Zaynab that this paradigm reached her contemporaries and still continues to until today.

Among the immediate effects of Zaynab's *majalis* was the increased dissidence against the Umayyad dynasty. In fact, Zaynab predicts Yazid's fall in her testimony: "The basis of your government and what you have built up will not last long and will

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[232] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 176.
[233] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 49.
[234] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 15.

soon break up."[235] She asserts, "So long as the heralder of righteousness heralds and the everlasting sound of truth rings in the ears, hearts will shy away from you and mouths will curse you and your oppression."[236] Following Zaynab's release from prison "she would become the rallying cry for the overthrow of the Umayyads."[237] Her traditions provided a bridge for people to learn what Yazid was capable of as caliph. He was a dangerous and ruthless ruler and "In his short reign of a little over three years, Yazid, according to general Islamic traditions, first killed Husayn, then had his army pillage Medina, rape its women and kill its men and finally destroyed the Ka'bah in the war against Ibn al-Zubayr."[238] This certainly led to popular opposition against his leadership with Karbala as "a major factor in the overthrow of Umayyad rule."[239] Zaynab's traditions were instrumental in raising political and social awareness for subsequent generations as well, evident by the Abbasid dynasty's efforts to subdue these ceremonies and destroy the tomb of Husayn.[240] This is not to mention more recent galvanization through *majlis* ceremonies during the Iranian Revolution.[241]

The remembrance of Karbala not only caused a social *jihad,* but a *jihad* in the hearts of devotees of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Her *majlis* ceremonies provide an interesting dimension to her martyr paradigm as they not only propagate her example of *jihad* and *shahadat* but also shape *jihad* for the followers of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Rather than just a

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[235] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 30.
[236] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 30.
[237] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 169.
[238] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 129. See also G.R. Hawting, "Yazīd (I) b. Muawiya," *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* ed. by P. Bearman et al (Brill 2008) 18 April 2008 <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-8000>.
[239] Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam* 200.
[240] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 153.
[241] Jafri, "Concept of Religion and Leadership." For a study of the political affects of remembering Karbala refer to *The Martyrs of Karbala* by Kamran Scot Agahie.

means of learning *jihad* by familiarizing oneself with Husayn and Karbala, some consider participation in these ceremonies as *jihad* in itself. Since Husayn's struggle was the greatest example of *jihad*, "then, in the mind of devotees, the participation of the community in his suffering and its ascent to the truth of his message must also be regarded as an extension of the holy struggle of the Imam himself."[242] Remarkably, not only did Zaynab embody the essence of *jihad al-akbar* and develop a method to remember Husayn's struggle, but her traditions are rendered as *jihad,* so the pious Shi'i who commemorates the tragedy of Karbala on a yearly basis also acts as a *mujahid* through his or her remembrance and mourning. Zaynab's struggle is transformed into traditions of mourning whereby the global Shi'i community can participate in her efforts to maintain the Imamate through her ceremonies.

On Mourning

The tradition that Zaynab initiated is called *majlis al-aza* or gathering of mourning. It is this aspect of mourning that has perplexed so many. In light of the reward that a martyr receives, not to mention the Prince of Martyrs, why is his account recalled in a sorrowful way? Karbala itself presents an interesting set of binaries: the ultimate injustice leads to the (at least symbolic) restoration of justice through Zaynab, physical death leads to eternal life, insurmountable grief leads to powerful galvanization and redemption. Mahmoud Ayoub recounts the latter of these at great length in *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* and explains mourning in the Shi'i tradition, which stands in complete opposition to Sunni views, where mourning is strongly discouraged if not

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[242] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 142.

completely forbidden.[243] Yet, Shi'i tradition holds that the Prophet himself grieved the losses of his loved ones, most notably when he declared 619 C.E., two years before *hijra*, as "the or year of grief" (*aml al-huzn*) and mourned for one year[244] at the passing of his beloved wife, Khadjia and his uncle, Abi Talib, one month later.

We see that Husayn makes Zaynab take a vow not to grieve on the day of 'Ashura as with Zayn al-Abidin incapacitated, she was the next in line to command the survivors in their distress and captivity. This cannot be rendered as a command to never weep, however, as when given the opportunity, Zaynab's sole request was to cry over her brother. She wished that "the rite which had been forbidden in Karbala should be permitted in Damascus,"[245] to mourn for their dead. Hence it was there that the very first *majlis* was held: Zaynab relating the terrible event of the massacre to the women, leading them in weeping over the loss of their brave men. Current ceremonies follow her precedent, consisting of poetry recitation honoring the martyrs, followed by a lecture by a learned orator that connects a religious or political issue to Karbala that recounts the tragedy and finally, a cathartic release through rhythmic hitting of the chest to more lamentation poetry.[246]

In close proximity to religious authority her entire life, including the Prophet, Zaynab undoubtedly had insight into martyrdom and the appropriate way of

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[243] Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* 31.
[244] Anita Rai, *Muhammad: Uncovering the True Story* (London: Starsighter Limited, 2006) 150-151.
[245] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 60.
[246] Unfortunately, attention to the symbols and self-flagellation that may accompany these ceremonies has grasped more attention than the purpose behind such rituals, leading to a shallow understanding of mourning traditions. Hitting of the chest and certainly, self-flagellation, may have been later developments. Refer to Hyder, *Reliving Karbala* 12.

commemorating it. Zayn al-Abidin's narrations and participation[247] in the ceremonies reinforce the legitimacy of mourning ceremonies. In fact, the fourth Imam was known as the greatest of all weepers as he cried for 40 years, longer than Adam at the separation from Eve and longer than Prophet Jacob, who cried at the temporary loss of his son, Joseph.[248]

Tears are the physical manifestation of remembering Husayn's courage to stand for his grandfather's message. The Imams have promised "great rewards for the tears of the devotees."[249] Mourning is considered rewardable and an act of worship for the Shi'i. Ja'far al-Sadiq, the sixth Imam, said "The sigh of the sorrowful for the wrong done to us is an act of praise (*tasbih*) [of God], his sorrow for us is an act of worship, and his keeping of our secret is a struggle (*jihad*) in the way of God."[250] Coming into his leadership almost sixty years after Karbala, the Imam's narration represents the importance of the mourning traditions for the community.

Following the death of Husayn and the increased sense of revolution among Muslims, the Imams and their followers came under particularly harsh scrutiny. Their teachings had to be done in hiding and "The only vehicle [to propagate their message] was the secret, yet active, participation in the suffering of the *ahl al-bayt* through weeping and other means of remembrance."[251] Through Zaynab's traditions, "The memory of the martyred Imam has been kept alive and nourished by the tears of the

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[247] Husayn tells Zayn al-Abidin upon his appointment as Imam, "My son, convey to my friends my Salaam and tell them their Imam has been killed away from his home, who was thirsty and hungry, and that they should mourn for me." Rai, *Essential Woman* 36-37.
[248] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 142.
[249] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 148.
[250] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 142.
[251] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 143.

faithful who vigorously share in the tragedy of the Imam Husayn and his loved ones and friends."[252] Furthermore, Ayoub says that these ceremonies hold a social significance as the Imams also participated in them: "Men like the fourth Imam, Zayn al-Abidin, and his descendents after him expressed their protest against the ruling authorities through their tears and the tears of their followers in private gatherings, where the suffering and wrong inflicted on the Holy Family were remembered and grieved."[253]

Zaynab's *majalis* shape Shi'i piety as "the concept of *jihad* (holy struggle) gained a deeper and more personal meaning...the Shi'i Muslim saw himself helping the Imam in his struggle against the wrong (*zulm*) and gaining for himself the same merit (*thawab*) of those who actually fought and died for him."[254] *Majalis* thus becomes an extension of Husayn and Zaynab's *jihad.* After all, what is a *majlis* if not reiterating Zaynab's testimony in the devotees present time and place? Shi'ites relive the tragedy but also remind themselves of the importance of standing for truth, justice, and Islam; they reenact Zaynab's *jihad.* Participating in this extension of her *jihad* inspires Muslims to lead a more pious life and continuously struggle in the path of God.

Karbala is not geographically bound, as Zaynab's traditions help it transcend limits of space and time to devotees wherever they are globally and spatially. As stated in the first chapter, the existence of the Shi'i has been a constant *jihad.* The struggle at Karbala is "...recast as antagonists in an ongoing struggle between liberation and oppression. Every age brings forth a new Yazid, and resistance to tyranny is incumbent

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[252] Ayoub, "The Excellences of the Imam Husayn."
[253] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 153.
[254] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 148.

upon every believer."[255] Husayn's message provides a source of hope and inspiration in desperate times: "Imam Husayn's martyrdom became a source of strength and endurance for Muslims in times of suffering, persecution and oppression. He has stood with every wronged man or woman before oppressive rulers, reproaching wrongdoers and encouraging the oppressed to persist in their struggle for freedom and dignity."[256] Often the minority that falls victim to discrimination and maltreatment, the remembrance of Karbala "bestows on Shi'ism a sense of legitimacy…while bolstering the argument that the succession of the Prophet should have remained within his family."[257] When experiencing their own hardship, the Shi'i find solace in the remembrance of Husayn and renew confidence in their faith.

Receiving such maltreatment from other Muslims is perhaps the true tragedy in the case of Karbala. Zaynab's first order of action upon returning to Medina was to visit the Prophet's grave where she complained[258] about what his nation (*ummah*) perpetrated against them. The indignity suffered by the survivors of the Prophet's household in addition to Husayn's brutal murder renders Karbala the most tragic and infamous of Islamic civil wars. Indeed, the name of the land itself entails the concept of mourning. About his younger grandson's death, Prophet Muhammad narrated, "I shall announce to [Husayn] his martyrdom in the land of sorrow (*karb*) and calamity (*bala*)."[259] Thus, Karbala is both figuratively and literally a place of sadness that manifests itself through the community's mourning in *majalis*.

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[255] Martin Kramer, ed. *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987) 7.
[256] Ayoub, "The Excellences of the Imam Husayn."
[257] Hyder, *Reliving Karbala* 9.
[258] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 58-59.
[259] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 41.

Devotion in Action: The Functional Paradigm in Shi'i Piety

Recounting the message of Karbala and the loyalty of Husayn's companions serves a functional purpose for the current Shi'i community as well as it reminds them of the Mahdi's impending arrival, revitalizing their passion for his cause and renewing their devotion to support the next divinely appointed leader in his struggle to establish righteousness on earth. Through recalling the loyalty of Husayn's supporters, the global Shi'i population reaffirms its loyalty to its present day leader, the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi.

Aligning oneself with his or her leader is essential for salvation as Imam 'Ali al-Rida said "If you wish to be with us in our high stations in paradise, rejoice for our joy and grieve for our sorrow, and hold fast to our authority (*walayah*); for even if a man would take a stone as his master (*wali*) God would bring him together with it for reckoning on the Day of Resurrection."[260] According to the eighth Imam, remembering divinely appointed leaders, including weeping for the injustice they suffered, is coupled with accepting their authority. Perhaps sorrowful remembrance affects the heart and mind in a powerful way. The eighth Imam also advised his companions on attaining the reward of the martyrs at Karbala through remembrance: "...If it would please you to have the reward (*thawab*) of those who were martyred with Husayn, say whenever you remember [them] 'Oh how I wish I were with them that I may have achieved victory.'"[261] While wishing he was with Husayn, the mourning devotee realizes that his chance may come soon. Just as Husayn's supporters had an obligation to align with him

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[260] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 147.
[261] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering is Islam* 147.

before entering into battle, the Mahdi's contemporaries face the same obligation for the impending battle between good and evil upon his arrival.

The Shi'i undoubtedly have an intimate connection with and compassion for the coming Messiah. They know his name, his parents' names, and revisit the struggle of his great grandfather at least once a year. If one were to forget Husayn, he is reminded every 'Ashura of the tragic events that engulfed the Imam and his household, and the hardship that overcame his surviving loved ones. Zaynab's traditions offer an avenue for pronouncing their devotion to their Imams: "Through ritual, religious men and women can relive an event in their spiritual history and renew their relationship with it."[262] So when the community pronounces, "Oh how I wish I were with them," they realize their opportunity is coming to help the twelfth Imam, a direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad and direct descendant of Husayn. Karbala serves as a parallel example to the impending battle for the Shi'i and Zaynab's testimony to the Kufians serves as a reminder that failing the Imam's call is equivalent to killing him. Her traditions help turn devotion into action: "It must be emphasized that those present at such services are not audiences or mere spectators, but active participants in the sacred drama…[it constitutes] a living reality ever present in the lives of the pious, a reality which grows more real with every succeeding generation."[263] Zaynab's traditions keep the message of Husayn alive in the hearts of believers, which enables them to wage righteous struggle every day and in every land. In this way as well, participating in *majlis* is *jihad* for the Shi'i

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[262] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 148.
[263] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 148.

Muslim as it rekindles his desire to struggle *fi sabil Allah* with their Imam, the route toward leaving this world as a *shahid*.

Majlis ceremonies recount the story of bravery, courage, and true, undying faith that a loyal supporter shows to his Imam, and deters one from being of those that Farazdaq warned Husayn against, that "Their hearts are with you, but their swords are with [Bani Umayya]." Zaynab's traditions show the current followers of the *Ahl al-Bayt* how to turn their devotion into action and transform their love for the Prophet's family into an alliance with the last of their line. Zaynab's traditions give "Shi'i religiosity unique character not seen in Sunni Islam"[264] due to its annual practice and active participation. The death of Husayn affected all of creation. Tabari reports blood underneath every stone and on walls for forty years[265] and Zaynab refers to the heavens raining blood in her sermon.[266] His decapitation caused the earth to tremble and mountains to shake.[267] Surely, if Husayn's death could cause mountains to shake, it can shake the heart of the believer to stay on the path of righteousness.

Through Zaynab's traditions, Karbala is not an event that remains in the past but rather, exists in the "Eternal Now"[268] and "may be extended back into the past and forward into the future."[269] As each generation, each community and each individual fights evil or *yazidiyyat* and maintains righteousness or *husayniyyat*, historical events take on a more definite role: "history is no longer the mere flow of happenings in time

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[264] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 277.
[265] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 131.
[266] Zaynab asks the Kufians, "Are you surprised that the Heavens would bleed?" Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 18.
[267] Peter Chelkowski, "Popular Shi'i Mourning Rituals," *Al-Serat* 12 (1986) 209.
[268] Akhtar, "Karbala', An Enduring Paradigm."
[269] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 148.

without purpose or direction. Rather, through the present moment, that is, the ritualistic moment, time and space became unified and events move toward a definite goal."[270] That goal for the current followers of *Ahl al-Bayt* is preparing themselves for the coming of the twelfth Imam.

Social Justice

Despite their minority status and discrimination as a heterodox group, "the Shi'i movements of today have developed highly original strategies of political action, which have often astonished and sometimes confused the wider Muslim and Western worlds."[271] On the local level, Shi'i women often invoke Zaynab as a model for social work and activism.[272] The paradigm we find at Karbala is not only useful for Muslims, but for non-Muslims and broader social causes. We have seen the ramifications from the noble message of Karbala in recent times: Mahatma Ghandi invoked Husayn as his guide to peaceful protest[273] who in turn inspired Dr. Martin Luther King Junior. The Civil Rights movement led to the liberation of African-Americans on our soil while the Battle of Karbala led to the liberation of Islam from the clutches of a tyrant.

Moreover, Zaynab and Husayn give us models of social justice by naming those who stand by and allow oppression to continue as guilty as those who perpetrate the act. Zaynab tells the people of Kufa who failed their pledge to Husayn, "O Kufians! Fie upon you! Do you know which part of Muhammad you have cut and the vow that you have

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[270] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 148.
[271] Kramer, *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution* ix.
[272] Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) 260.
[273] *Reflections,* 3.1 (2007): 7. Ghandi said, "I studied the life of Imam Husayn, the great martyr of Islam, in detail. I carefully examined the pages concerning Karbala and it became very clear that if India wants to achieve victory, then it must follow the way of Husayn."

broken?"[274] If not standing with the oppressed, you are the oppressor. Husayn's sermon to the Umayyad army adds to the *Ahl al-Bayt's* concept of social justice:

> People, the Apostle of God said: When anyone sees the authorities make permissible what God had forbidden, violating God's covenant, and opposing the Sunnah of the Apostle of God by action against the servants of God sinfully and with hostility, when anyone sees all these incidents and does not upbraid them by deed or by word, it is God's decree to make that person subject to fortune.[275]

This tells us that in Shi'ism, there is a mutual responsibility between the community and its leader to ensure religion is properly followed, and all are responsible in opposing oppression and enjoining justice.[276]

Shahadat of Zaynab bint 'Ali

Just as in life, Zaynab's death was no different in stirring the hearts of the people. Although the manner of her death is contentious, there is reason to speculate that she was killed. In Medina, Zaynab continued to preach the message of her brother and imparted the events of Karbala and Damascus. Intense feelings of anger and mistrust grew within the city and the Medinans instilled an independent government. The Umayyad powers then sacked and pillaged Medina;[277] the men were killed indiscriminately and the women were raped.[278] Zaynab accompanied Zayn al-Abidin to Damascus when Yazid summoned him shortly after the ordeal.

While reliving her experiences in the city of her imprisonment, Zaynab was mourning for her brother in a garden when the gardener, a supporter of Yazid, found and

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[274] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 18.
[275] Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l muluk* 95-96.
[276] Also, a letter from Husayn and Zaynab's father, 'Ali, to Malik ibn Ashtar serves as the basis for the U.N. Human Rights Charter. See George Jordan's *The Voice of Human Justice.*
[277] Syed Mohsin Naquvi, *The Tragedy of Karbala* (Princeton: Mohsena Memorial Foundation, 1992) 71.
[278] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* 143. This confrontation is known as the battle of al-Harrah and the children born out of this are called the children of al-Harrah.

fatally struck Zaynab with his spade.[279] Alternatively, Zaynab may have died of natural causes in Damascus. But being such a short time after Karbala, there is no doubt that Zaynab consistently propagated the *Ahl al-Bayt's* efforts to preserve Islam, rendering her death *shahadat* regardless of how she died. She was buried in a suburb of Damascus, Syria, the neighborhood being named after her: Sayyedah Zaynab. She died in 682 C.E., only six months after her release from prison.[280] Zaynab is recalled today in times of sadness, when protesting injustice, and when standing for truth, as she is the "spokeswoman"[281] of God's appointed leaders.

Popular liturgy affirms the *shahadat* of Zaynab bint 'Ali. Hyder cites a poem by Iftikhar Arif: "The last page of the book of martyrdom, Zaynab."[282] As such, she is "inextricably bound not only to the cause of Hosayn but to the overall cause of the Prophet of Islam."[283] Striving to maintain the religion of her grandfather, Zaynab is undoubtedly a martyr of Islam, regardless of if she was killed or not. Scholars on the subject allude to Zaynab as a *shahid* though it is not directly affirmed. Hyder writes, "Husain and Abbas are the masculine faces of martyrdom; Zainab is its feminine face."[284] It is my firm belief that Zaynab bint 'Ali attained martyrdom at the time of her death through her constant *jihad* to impart the truth to all who would listen.

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[279] Shahin, *Lady Zaynab* 220-221. Shi'i tradition overwhelmingly favors this report while other accounts assert that Zaynab was exiled to Egypt where she died in Cairo, although that may be her half-sister, Zaynab al-Wusta. Egyptian locals affirm that it is the granddaughter of the Prophet, where visiting her tomb is a popular tradition among the majority Sunni Muslims. Refer to *Pure and Powerful* by Nadia Abu-Zahra and *A Border Passage* by Leila Ahmed for accounts of Egyptian Muslim women's piety.
[280] Rizvi, *Syeda Zainab* 10.
[281] Rai, *Essential Woman* 57.
[282] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 171.
[283] Hyder,"Sayyedeh Zaynab" 175.
[284] Hyder, *Reliving Karbala* 95.

On the eve of 'Ashura, Shi'ites worldwide pay sorrowful tribute to Zaynab. A popular Urdu elegy reads, "We convey greetings to our princess…She has to teach the way of Husayn, in the manner of 'Ali."[285] South Asian poetry often calls Zaynab *shehzadi* or "'princess'…not because she is entitled to such a title on a worldly level, but because she is the princess of God's kingdom, of the hereafter, of a realm in which worldly glory fades into nonexistence."[286] Through her own struggle, Zaynab preserves the ultimate example of *jihad* and *shahadah*, and her traditions of remembrance give a tangible form of *jihad* to Shi'ites worldwide as they are able to partake in the struggle of Husayn and align themselves with their present Imam. Through Zaynab, Karbala transforms from an isolated incident in a desolate land to a cause that is global, universal, and eternal, earning her the title as the Princess of Martyrs.

[285] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 163.
[286] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 169.

CONCLUSION

"The last page of the book of martyrdom, Zaynab"[287]

In his letter to the people of Basra, Husayn says that his grandfather's *Sunnah* has been "obliterated" at the hands of Yazid. Through Zaynab, the *Sunnah* is revived as she tells the caliph, "You will not be able to obliterate our name." As long as the *Ahl al-Bayt* are remembered, so is the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Zaynab's powerful testimony heralds truth for the followers of the *Ahl al-Bayt* then and now. The event of Karbala stands in history as the ultimate culmination of injustice and subsequent restoration of justice through Zaynab. To fully impact society, Hyder contends that Karbala necessarily includes both genders: "Karbala is not constructed through the exclusion of the feminine, but with the feminine as an integral component."[288] Zaynab's words give life to Husayn's death and explain the struggle of the *Ahl al-Bayt*: "Her grandfather had completed the cycle of messages that were revealed by God. Her mother and father had stood steadfast and confronted the ruling authority of the time (Abu Bakr). Her brother had sacrificed his own life and that of his family to preserve the message of God. All these deeds needed to be brought to light, and for that, God had chosen Zaynab."[289] Zaynab's fortitude is what continues to draw me to her story. Her gender neither takes away nor adds to her forcefulness as traditionally, "speaking for the cause of justice had been the vocation of the Prophet's family," so this is expected of Zaynab.

Notably, I do not specifically discuss gender in this study. If I had, I would be compelled to point out several details: the fact that Zaynab still sought permission from

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[287] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 171.
[288] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 176.
[289] Hyder, "Sayyedeh Zaynab" 168.

her husband before leaving with Husayn to Karbala,[290] the loss of her children, the seizure of her veil. The taking of Zaynab's veil stands as a prominent detail in the aftermath of Karbala as it epitomizes Yazid's transgression of the Prophet's family. Initially, I began this project thinking Zaynab would present a higher model of Shi'i womanhood and indeed, she does. But I felt I would not do justice to her memory by confining her to one sex. More so, I have come to see Zaynab as presenting a higher moral and social ideal for all of humanity.

In the beginning of her study on Zaynab, Diane D'Souza recalls her Sunni professor's opinion about Shi'i women and leadership: "From the time they are young, they're being trained. They're really quite strong."[291] D'Souza details Zaynab's essential role in shaping Shi'i women's activism. The overwhelming recognition and approval of Zaynab's dynamic personality and actions by the Shi'i makes me question if some Islamic traditions sanction more egalitarian ideals than others, and if those ideals are actually realized. Zaynab is a gateway to broader studies on Shi'ism and gender in Islam, as she challenges normative ideals of struggle, martyrdom, and the social, cultural, and religious expectations of Muslim women. She is a defender of truth, enforcer of justice, and a martyr of Islam. Zaynab demonstrates that *jihad* and *shahadat* are not monopolized by men. Women can wholeheartedly partake in the maintenance of their religion and set a paradigm of struggle *fi sabil Allah* for generations to come. Zaynab preserved the religion of her grandfather by saving the life of the Imam, preserving the message of Husayn, and delivering testimony against the injustice that perpetrated the

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[290] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 29.
[291] D'Souza, "The Figure of Zaynab in Shi'i Devotional Life" 201.

Ahl al-Bayt. Through her actions, Zaynab secures the station of martyrdom by living as a *mujahida*.

This thesis illustrates the importance of martyrdom for Shi'ites and the integral role Zaynab plays in accessing the supreme paradigm of righteous struggle and martyrdom, Husayn ibn 'Ali. Zaynab presents a different but valid model of *jihad* and *shahadat*. The Shi'i have used her patient struggle for centuries and engage in her *jihad* by retaining her *majlis* traditions. By reliving the struggle of Husayn in the way Zaynab did, the Shi'i devotee prepares for his or her present Imam and is reminded of the daily struggle to live as a *mujahid*. Zaynab exemplifies a legitimate model of martyrdom for every Muslim but nevertheless, her gender may contribute to her memory being shaped in a specific fashion.

Despite her testimony's visibility in Shi'i literature and history, it is curiously absent from prominent scholarship,[292] such as Tabari's account. Although he records Karbala in great detail, including the horrific fate of the martyrs and the events at Kufa, Tabari makes no mention of Zaynab's sermon in Yazid's court. I contend that gender bias is not to blame here, as the defiant speech of the fourth Imam in Damascus is not chronicled either.[293] Interestingly, while M.H. Bilgrami writes a popular tribute to Zaynab, his preface maintains that the appropriate domain of women is in the home, "but this rule can only apply if all the other elements of a pure Muslim society are equal. If

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[292] Zaynab's testimony is widely available in many languages, but the most notable record remains in Mohammed Baqir al-Majlisi's voluminous hadith collection, *Bihar al-Anwar*.

[293] There are competing histories on whether Yazid was harsh or kind with the captives. Tabari relies on the opinion that Yazid treated the captives with relative kindness and regretted the actions of his governor. However, even historians hostile to the Shi'i are unable to show evidence that Yazid reprimanded Ibn Ziyad in any way or released the captives in a timely fashion, rendering the claim suspicious. Jafari, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* 194-195.

[society]...is chaotic and imbalanced, then that is the time when a woman feels compelled to emerge into the open arena."[294] For Bilgrami, Zaynab was forced to speak against the injustice at Karbala because of the transgression against the Prophet's household. However, his view still does not explain Zaynab's testimony as Zayn al-Abidin was present and despite his illness, delivered a sermon in Damascus as well.[295]

Moreover, while Zaynab enjoys recognition in Shi'i literature, most devotional works either do not address her death or paint a sorrowful picture of her last months: "This state turned her into a soulless, feeble body waiting for death, which would be the only relief."[296] Indeed, continually recounting such a tragedy would affect anyone, but as the "partner of Husayn" and the "heroine of Karbala" I contend that Zaynab should be seen in a light similar to Husayn and the other martyrs, as someone who was wronged and experienced impossible hardship, but continued on her mission bravely and strongly. Being a woman does not annul her *shahahat* in any way; it presents her as an ideal model for anyone seeking an alternative *jihad* in the way of God.

Zaynab stands simultaneously as a sectarian and unifying force by vehemently protesting against the caliph of her time while defending her grandfather's religion. Her testimony exposes the true nature of Yazid, who with the façade of a Muslim leader, could have endangered the continuance of Islam. Her actions were necessary to reinforce Husayn's martyrdom and save Islam for coming generations, both Sunni and Shi'i. With

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[294] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth* 13.
[295] This is not to mention Fatima al-Zehra's famous sermon in Abu Bakr's court. Rai, *Essential Woman* 16-24.
[296] Badr, *Lady Zaynab* 219.

her importance to the preservation and maintenance of their religion, all Muslims should seek inspiration for struggle and martyrdom *fi sabil Allah* from the Princess of Martyrs.

APPENDIX I

Zaynab's Testimony in Yazid's Court[297]

"Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds and blessings on my grandfather, the Chief of Divine Prophets. O Yazid, Allah says, and his word is true, that: 'Then evil was the end of those who did evil because they rejected the communications of Allah and used to mock them.' {30:10}

"O Yazid, do you believe that you have succeeded in closing the sky and the earth for us and that we have become your captives just because we have been brought before you in a row and that you have secured control over us? Do you believe that we have been afflicted with insult and dishonour by Allah and that you have been given honour and respect by Him? You have become boastful of this apparent victory that you have secured and you have started feeling jubilant and proud over this prestige and honour. You think that you have achieved worldly good and that your affairs have become stable and our rule has fallen into your hands. Wait for a while. Do not be so joyful. Have you forgotten Allah's saying: 'The unbelievers should not carry the impression that the time allowed to them by us is good for them. Surely we give them time so that they may increase their evil deeds, and eventually they will be given insulting chastisement.' {3:178}

"O son of freed slaves, is this your justice that you keep your own daughters and slave maids veiled while the daughters of the Prophet of Allah are being paraded from place to place exposed? You have dishonoured us by unveiling our faces. Your men take us from town to town where all sorts of people, whether they be residents of the hills or of riversides have been looking at us. The near as well as the remote ones, the poor as well as the rich, the low as well as the high all casting their glances at us while our position is such that there is no male relative of ours to render us help or support.

"O Yazid, whatever you have done proves your revolt against Allah and your denial of His Prophet, of the Book and Sunnah that the Holy Prophet brought from Allah. Your deeds should not cause amazement because one whose [ancestress] chewed the livers of the martyrs, whose flesh grew up on virtuous people, who fought against the Chief of Divine Prophets, who mobilized parties for fighting against him and drew swords against him, should conspicuously excel all Arabs in unbelief, sinfulness, excesses, and enmity against Allah and His Prophet. Remember that the evil deeds and sinful actions that you have committed are the result of unbelief and old rancour you bear because of your ancestors who were killed in Badr.

"One who cast his glance of enmity, malice and rancour upon us does not lag behind in practicing enmity against us. He proves his unbelief, declares it with his

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[297] Rai, *Essential Woman* 51-55. Reprinted with permission from Anita Rai.

tongue and jubilantly proclaims: 'I have killed the sons of the Prophet of Allah and made his progeny captive,' and wishes that his ancestors had lived to see his achievement [to have exclaimed], 'O Yazid, may your hands not lose their strength, you have wreaked good vengeance on our behalf.' O Yazid, you are striking the lips of Imam Hussain with your stick in front of this crowd while these very lips used to be kissed by the Prophet of Allah, and yet your face reflects pleasure and happiness.

"By my life, by killing the chief of youths of Paradise, the son of the chief of Arabs, 'Ali and the shining sun of the progeny of Abd-ul-Muttalib, you have deepened our wound and uprooted us completely. By killing Hussain ibn 'Ali you have gained nearness to the state of your unbelieving ancestors. You proclaim your deed with pride and if they were to see you they would approve of your action and pray that Allah may not paralyse your arms.

"O Yazid! If you had heart enough to take account of your nefarious deeds, you yourself would surely wish your arms to be paralysed and severed from your elbow and you would wish that your parents had not given birth to you because you would know that Allah has become displeased with you. Allah, grant us our rights. Punish those who have oppressed us.

"O Yazid! You did what you wished, but remember that you have cut your own skin and your own flesh to pieces. Soon you will be brought before the Holy Prophet. You will be overburdened with the weight of your sins committed by shedding the blood of his progeny and by dishonouring his family. The place to which you will be taken will be before all the members of his family. The oppressed will be avenged and the enemies will be punished.

"O Yazid! It is not seeming for you to swell with joy after slaying the Prophet's progeny. 'Reckon not those who are killed in Allah's way as dead; nay, they are alive and are provided sustenance from their Lord; rejoicing in what Allah has given them out of His grace.' {3:169-170} Allah is sufficient to deal with you. The Messenger of Allah is your antagonist and [Gabriel] is our support and help against you.

"Those who have made you the head of state and burdened the Muslims with your leadership will soon find out what awaits them. The end of all tyrants is agony.

"O Yazid! I speak not to you thus to warn you of the severe chastisement in store for you so that you should be regretful; for you are one of those whose hearts are hardened, souls are rebellious and whose bodies are busy in Allah's disobedience while they are under the curse of the Prophet of Allah. You are from among those in whose heart Satan has made his abode and has been breeding young ones.

"How amazing it is that the virtuous people, sons of the divine prophets and vicegerents are killed at the hands of liberated slaves, evil-doers and sinners. Our blood

is shed by their hands and our flesh serves as food for them. We feel grieved for those whose bodies are lying un-shrouded and unburied in the battlefield, wounded with arrows.

"O Yazid, if you consider our defeat as your achievement then you will have to pay its price. Allah commits no injustice to His servants. Our reliance is on Allah. He alone is our Relief and place of Protection, and in Him alone do we repose our hope.

"You may contrive and try however much you can. By Him who honoured us with revelation, the Book and Prophethood, you cannot achieve our status, nor reach our position, nor can you affect our mention, nor remove from yourself that shame and dishonour that is now your lot because of perpetrating excess and oppression on us. Your word now is weak and your days are counted. Beware of the day when the announcer would announce the curse of Allah on the oppressors and the unjust.

"Praise be to Allah who gave good end to His friends and granted them success in their aims, and thereafter called them back to His mercy, pleasure and bliss, while you hurled yourself into evil and mischief by committing injustice against them. We pray to Allah to favour us with full recompense through them and grant us the good of Khilafat and Imamate. Surely Allah is Kind and the Most Merciful over His creatures."

APPENDIX II

Ziyarat (Salutation) to Zaynab bint 'Ali ibn Abi Talib[298]

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of the Chief of Prophets

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of the Master of the sanctuary and the banner

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of him who was made to ascend to the (highest) heaven and reached the station of two bows' length (to Allah) or even closer

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of the Leader of the pious

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of the Support of the sincere friends (of Allah)

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of the Leader of the *deen* (religion)

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of the Commander of the faithful

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of him who struck with the sword of two blades

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of him who prayed towards the two *Qiblahs* [Jerusalem then Mecca]

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of Muhammad, the Chosen

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of Ali, the Content (with the decree of Allah)

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of Fatima, the Radiant

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of Khadija, the Elder

Peace be upon you, Oh righteous one, pleasing (to Allah)

Peace be upon you, Oh learned, rightly guided one

Peace be upon you, Oh generous, noble one

Peace be upon you, Oh pious, pure one

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[298] Bilgrami, *Victory of Truth*, 68-73. The *ziyarat* of Zaynab can be recited at any time, but is popularly said on her birthday, death anniversary, during Muharram and Safar, and when visiting her tomb.

Peace be upon you, Oh you who were thoroughly tested by sufferance like Husayn, the oppressed

Peace be upon you, Oh you who were kept far from your home

Peace be upon you, Oh you who were held captive in cities

Peace be upon you, Oh daughter of the greatest endeared friend of Allah

Peace be upon you, Oh sister of the glorified friend of Allah

Peace be upon you, Oh aunt of the revered friend of Allah

Peace be upon you, Oh sister of misfortunes, Sayyida Zaynab, and may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you

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